

POWER IN THE LAND: HOME DEMONSTRATION IN FLORIDA, 1915-1960

By

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS AND CITATIONS

SC	University of Florida Special Collections
SL	State Library of Florida
FSU	Florida State University Strozier Library
NARA	National Archives and Record Administration
SC-21-4	Special Collections, Series 21, Box 4
SL-32	State Library, Microfilm Reel 32
FSU-32	Florida State University, Microfilm Reel 32
NARA-33.6-54	National Archives, Record Group 33.6, Box 54.
Ethel Atkinson, Escambia AR 1935	Ethel Atkinson, Annual Report of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics for 1935, Escambia County

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This dissertation examines the remarkably tensile nature, and eventual decline, of the Cooperative Extension Service's home demonstration program during much of its tenure in Florida. Lawmakers and reformers intended home demonstration, created by legislative act in 1914, to be a comprehensive system of rural uplift, via education among rural families. Home demonstration functioned as one division of a three-pronged extension apparatus that also included farm demonstration and 4-H. All extension workers utilized demonstrations as the backbone of their educational mission. Rather than rely solely on traditional materials and abstract ideas, however, home demonstration agents extended their own domestic science education to women by conducting demonstrations in rural homes and communities, organizing project clubs, and tailoring their work to community needs. Home demonstration involved a wide range of programs for both women and girls, but participation in any program or event was voluntary; information about new ideas, successful techniques, and agent reliability spread largely by word of mouth.

Many historians studying home demonstration have characterized and dismissed it as plagued by racism, sexism, romanticism, class and regional bias, and limited efficacy. Though these conditions, to varying degrees, were persistent problems for home demonstration, the program proved remarkably durable. Equally important as its longevity was the impact of endurance on home demonstration's original sense of purpose. I examine this relationship in light of home demonstration's dynamism, which fostered adaptability and, in turn, durability in the face of internal and external change. The framework for this analysis is home demonstration's evolution from a deeply focused, cohesive mission to an imprecise collection of specialties. To demonstrate this dynamism-longevity-evolution connection, I analyze home demonstration's rural reform lineage, its professional dynamics, its reliance on technology and expertise, its cooperative health programs, and its expansive activism. The key to home demonstration's vitality has been momentum, diplomacy, utility, and initiative, and the key to its significance is its evolving place in the wider, international story of reform in favor of rural women.

CHAPTER 1

“CAST DOWN YOUR BUCKET WHERE YOU ARE”: HOME DEMONSTRATION ON THE GROUND AND AT LARGE

In 1928, home demonstration Home Improvement Specialist Virginia P. Moore issued a provocative bulletin to rural women in Florida. Her subject was home sanitation, and she tackled the potentially delicate topic with no hint of delicacy. Moore assailed her readers with a series of disturbing images, facts, and warnings about the dangers lurking in manure piles, privies, and wells. Flies, their legs coated with indescribable filth, routinely landed on tables, dishes, and food, exposing entire families to debilitating and dangerous disease.

In 1947, home demonstration women across Florida put their collective knowledge about food preservation and nutrition to use by processing, collecting, and shipping overseas carloads of food for those left hungry in the wake of the Second World War. Decades of experience in Florida combined with rural women's sense of activism manifested in a concerted effort to provide practical, fundamental relief for those far away who were less fortunate than themselves.

In 1961, the State Council of Senior Home Demonstration Work attended a lecture regarding the role of poverty and corruption in fostering communism in Latin American countries. The Council's International Affairs committee resolved to “better the situation by sending pamphlets in various phases of home economics” to a university in Brazil.¹ The

¹ Virginia P. Moore, “Questions on Home Sanitation to Make You Think,” Circular No. 987 (Gainesville: University of Florida, reprint 1931); *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1947* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948); *Report of State Senior Council of Florida Home Demonstration Work, 1961*, 116. Home demonstration was a program of comprehensive rural reform for women and families across the United States that operated, officially, from 1914 until the 1960s, when its name changed to Extension Home Economics, then to Family and Consumer Sciences, its current incarnation. Though it received its start

contrast in reform vigor represented in these stories is not illusory, but a marker of an aggressive, focused force gradually collapsing into a flaccid, imprecise array of disciplines.

On their own, each of these manifestations of reform among Florida rural women is arguably important. And clearly these cursory highlights tell only a dramatically simplified story. But what is equally clear, equally important, is that these snapshots of home demonstration's history in Florida, when taken together, reveal a disappointing trend. In the little more than three decades represented in the examples above, home demonstration evolved from a vigorous, mission-oriented program unified around a singular and ambitious goal of rural rejuvenation into a placid, issue-oriented collection of advice and seminars. In 1928, home demonstration programs were meaty, practical, and fundamental. In 1961, home demonstration programs were hollowed out, superficial, and detached. Again, that is an overly simple representation, but how did this happen?

In short, home demonstration sacrificed vitality for viability as it worked to survive the changes in its demographic, economic, and social contexts. In its heyday, home demonstration's durability only made it more vigorous, more substantial. But especially after World War II, when changing demographics threatened the very existence of home demonstration, it evolved rapidly into a more contemporary, but less ambitious, program. And why is this important? Because when home demonstration was at its best, it accomplished real good. So trading vitality for viability, usually unwittingly, cost not only home demonstration, but the people it might have helped.

as informal gatherings of women and girls through canning clubs, Farmers' Institutes and the like, home demonstration was formally created as part of the new Cooperative Extension Service by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 as part of a three-prong system of education for rural Americans; it also included agricultural extension for men and 4-H for youth. Though there was much overlap between the branches, home demonstration was comprised of female agents, agricultural extension of male agents and 4-H of both. Funding, personnel, materials, research, etc. involved in home demonstration came from three cooperating sources: the federal government via the USDA, state governments and local, county sources including county commission, school boards and local businesses. Participation in all programs was voluntary.

To evaluate the entire scope of home demonstration's evolution in this dissertation would be impossible. Since the nature of home demonstration's evolution was determined in great part by its efforts to remain relevant and durable, I will examine primarily the steps home demonstration took to survive. Each chapter demonstrates both how home demonstration secured its durability, and how its strategies either strengthened or weakened it. The trend that emerges is that home demonstration reached the zenith of its influence, importance, and spirit during the twenty years or so before World War II, and then began a slow shift in the 1950s, toward a decline over the rest of the century. I am in no way suggesting that home demonstration's declension was entirely HDAs' own doing, for quite apart from what they could control, circumstances were changing that forced home demonstration to either adapt or wither away. *How* HDAs adapted and the impact of those choices is the focus of my thesis.

Though the bulk of the dissertation deals specifically with home demonstration's strategies for longevity, those strategies are part of several much larger trends that are critical for understanding home demonstration's history. First, as is most evident in Chapter 2, home demonstration was a part of a much larger reform movement that extended back into at least the 19th century and forward into the present day. Though early-20th century Progressives articulated the woes that led to the call for home demonstration, the impetus for rural reform in favor of women both antedated and outlived the Progressive's Country Life Movement. Most historians dealing with home demonstration locate its roots within the Country Life Movement and the subsequent Smith-Lever Act of 1914, but there is ample evidence that female agrarian reform had been developing, slowly and fitfully, during the previous century.

Home demonstration's emphasis on practical education and demonstration, like its agricultural demonstration counterpart, has much in common with the surge in agricultural

societies and universities that took place in the 19th century. Already by that point, women were being included to some extent in agricultural interests and education, so that Smith-Lever's official inclusion of female extension work in the broader extension program was not unprecedented. And as the transition from the gritty work of sanitation to anti-communism leaflets demonstrates, home demonstration did not suddenly stop evolving any more than it suddenly started. This long-term picture of home demonstration is particularly valuable for understanding how it matured and then declined.

My second major claim is that home demonstration did not accomplish the comprehensive, socio-economic, racial and gender reform of the rural South that many historians might have expected, indeed, what many have looked for. Moreover, home demonstration did not *intend* to accomplish this. It is telling that as home demonstration moved from more tangible, immediate efforts like sanitation into more social and moral efforts like citizenship, it *lost* rather than gained a sense of purpose. As I will outline further on, many historians critical of home demonstration base their critique on an assumption that "reform" or "uplift" entails righting social wrongs. To these critics, it follows that home demonstration did not "do" anything. Quite the contrary, home demonstration tackled serious deficiencies in rural life.

Indeed, the dogged pragmatism apparent in Moore's sanitation bulletin is indicative of home demonstration's early mission: practical improvement in daily living toward better health, financial security, environmental comfort, and emotional satisfaction. Certainly, conventions, regulations, and mandates from on high constrained home demonstration agents (HDAs), but it is crucial to keep in mind that home demonstration had its own agenda, and accomplishing that was the priority. For all their ideological talk about uplift and country life,

what agents set out to achieve was substantial improvement. Empowerment did not come in speeches; it came in jars of canned fruit and improved privies.

My third contention is related to the second, and that is that home demonstration accomplished tangible good in its time in Florida, particularly in the decades before World War II. In the historians' quest for watersheds, revolutions, and paradigm shifts it is easy to overlook the seemingly ordinary improvements in food preservation, home sanitation, technology, clothing construction, etc. And to modern readers, the advent of the pressure cooker or the sanitary privy hardly sounds impressive, but these mundane details were, in many cases, the difference between life and death, want and plenty, burden and ease. At its heart, the story of home demonstration is not about statistics, percentages, or even ideologies—it is about people. Indeed, home demonstration's good works in the ordinary left the most extraordinary mark; home demonstration did not leave a legacy of ousting communism or ending segregation, but it did save lives and ameliorate harsh living conditions.

As I emphasize in Chapters 4 and 5, that means that *each* improvement mattered. HDAs advocated technologies like electricity, freezers, pressure canners, refrigerators, and running water. In some cases, such technologies saved labor, in others they ensured better health. Agents educated women about proper nutrition for themselves and their children, helped install lunchrooms in community schools, organized Better Baby Clinics and immunization drives with county nurses and the Red Cross, and encouraged families to be tested for hookworm and tuberculosis. Agents assisted families looking for greater convenience and comfort by distributing plans for sleeping porches to expand living spaces, offered advice on native plants to beautify yards with minimal expense, and demonstrated easy fixes for cosmetic aggravations. And though a plethora of services and organizations later arose to meet a variety of community needs, HDAs were in the trenches when there were

few other allies capable of waging difficult and discouraging wars on disease, poverty, and scarcity, and they did so on the most local levels.

My final major claim is that localism was one of, if not the most, significant determinants of what home demonstration accomplished. Most evident in Chapter 3, HDAs' relationship with locals was the most crucial and often the most difficult of any they formed, but it was absolutely vital to their success. Of course home demonstration's original manifesto was inspired by the domestic discontent "exposed" in the Country Life Movement, and its methodology derived from Seaman Knapp's experience with the proven success of demonstration as the ultimate teaching and reform tool. But throughout its tenure in Florida, the home demonstration dynamic was most clearly defined by local circumstance. An Extension Food Conservation specialist, Alice Cromartie, articulated this obligation: "A program's only reason for existing is when those whom it serves can find a purpose for the program to exist."² Though funding originated with the federal Department of Agriculture, and state governments also provided some financial backing, home demonstration ultimately relied upon local funding to put and keep work in place. And because most home demonstration work took place among local women and families, HDAs were dependent upon a local audience. Historians have been inclined to cast localism as a deterrent to reform, assuming that federal or state influences were naturally progressive and open-minded, but that local people were inherently and arbitrarily suspicious of reform, reformers, and change. William Link's work on Southern Progressivism embodies this argument. Link's evaluation of public health and education campaigns, for example, reveals what one reformer called "'a good law poorly executed.'" According to Link, "strong local opposition" limited the scope and ruined the hopes of Progressive reformers.

²Alice L. Cromartie, Food Conservation and Production AR 1951 (SC-91B-12), 8-9.

In his larger work, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, Link establishes a strict dichotomy between traditionalists' individualistic localism and reformers' paternalistic humanitarianism, the effect of which was to thwart positive goals in education, health, women's suffrage, and child labor.³ Both portraits are overly simplified, and as Elizabeth Hayes Turner points out, do not account for "the multitudes of women in small towns who joined the woman's club movement to improve their communities."⁴ Indeed, Link's and similar analyses consider reform from the perspective of federal agents in a battle with local leaders who would not enforce reform agendas. But as Turner observes, there were other levels of reform that operated locally, and home demonstration was a significant bridge between federal commission reform and woman's club reform.

Home demonstration was a federal program in which most and the most important reforms took place locally. True, in some instances local politics, social relationships, or economics stymied home demonstration work. But in other areas, local influences were positive and empowering for HDAs. The variation between counties' and communities' response to home demonstration and HDAs is one of the most vital for this discussion. Not only does it enrich the context of home demonstration work, but it helps explain why home demonstration evolved as it did. The initial zeal of sanitation work, for instance, originated in part from an effort to meet local communities' felt need. By the time HDAs were discussing democratization and foreign policy, reform was less urgent and agents were scrambling for ways to remain relevant. Without local support, home demonstration had little, if any, chance of developing. In the effort to stay ahead of changing times, however, is where home

³ William A. Link, "Privies, Progressivism, and Public Schools: Health Reform and Education in the Rural South, 1909-1920," *The Journal of Southern History* 54 (November 1988): 639; *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

⁴ Elizabeth Hayes Turner, "The Paradox of Southern Progressivism: Review," *The Journal of Southern History* 60 (August 1994): 603.

demonstration lost some of its zest, and where it drifted *away* from local needs that it may still have met.

The central dynamic in this study is the impact of local determinism. For better and for worse, local interest, need, finances, politics, and social structures determined the shape of home demonstration's evolution. But it is impossible to understand localism's impact without studying home demonstration on the local level, from counties to the state. Florida's home demonstration experience provides such a context, for home extension began in Florida before 1914, and steadily developed and expanded throughout the period of this study. Florida's extensive and in-depth record of home demonstration, then, offers ample evidence of the program on the ground, demonstrating first, the distinctive character of any home demonstration agenda at the most local level. Second, the mingling of local character with a regional and national reform ethos, organization, and methodology allows us to see home demonstration at work broadly, as well. The particulars of home demonstration vary from state to state, but how HDAs responded to those details is suggestive of the history of home demonstration across twentieth-century America.

Florida provides a viable base for studying home demonstration because it is distinctive, but not exceptional. Like the other Southern states where extension began early, Florida's home demonstration shows a steady growth pattern in both the number of agents and the counties in which they worked. Moreover, Florida's rural population, black, white, and Hispanic alike, underwent the same dramatic changes that other Southern states' did, as urban development rapidly eclipsed rural growth. Finally, though Florida's economy, heavily based in tourism, was more diverse than much of the South's, it nevertheless was characterized by a pronounced reliance upon agriculture. A brief history of home demonstration in Florida

demonstrates both an overall pattern shared by Southern and, to some extent, national home demonstration programs, as well as a distinct story shaped by local individuals.

By 1961, more than one hundred HDAs were at work in Florida, but reaching that level of entrenchment was a long process. As an overall trend, the total number of HDAs increased over the years, though the number of black agents within that total remained steady. Time, too, saw home demonstration's catalog of programs diversify considerably, so that agents were covering more topics, but in less depth, than in the early decades of the work.

Though the Smith-Lever Act made home demonstration, and all extension work, official in 1914, the work was underway in Florida as early as 1909. The evolution of extension work from a relatively grassroots initiative to an enabling bureaucracy to a hefty government program is itself indicative of home demonstration's own evolution from a mission to a service. In 1909, a State Agent named A. S. Merhag reported on his work with cotton farmers in North Florida. Anticipating that the boll weevil would reach Florida by 1911, Merhag, an assistant named A. C. Johnson, and the U. S. Department of Agriculture set about establishing demonstration farms in five panhandle counties. Not unexpectedly, the initial reception to agricultural reforms was not particularly enthusiastic. As Merhag noted, "the people of this state have just begun to farm intensively," diversifying their typical pursuits in cattle, lumber, truck farming, and turpentine. In 1909, Merhag reported cooperation from thirty-seven demonstrators, using funding from the General Education Board and the USDA. Merhag made no mention of work among women or girls, but that soon changed.⁵

In fact, demonstration work was already beginning to take the shape it would hold for decades to come. As of 1912, funding would be a combined project of the USDA and the

⁵ A. S. Merhag, *Report of Demonstration Work in Florida, 1909* (FSU-1).

State of Florida, and “some co-operation from local sources is also expected.” The number of agents and demonstrators, too, were growing. As of 1911 thirteen agents had been added (with a plan for nine more in 1912), and more than 800 demonstrators were participating. Work had been extended into several southern Florida counties with rising interest in doing more with the peninsula. Most significant for this discussion, boys’ corn clubs were underway and plans were in place to begin girls’ tomato clubs the next year. Together with Farmers’ Institutes, corn and tomato clubs were the direct precursors to work with rural women.

In 1912, children’s club work had been given a leader, Agnes Ellen Harris, who would be the first State HDA in Florida.⁶ By 1913, Harris was surveying the women supervising girls’ club work to assess how many girls were participating, what procedures they were following, and what plans they were making. In 1914, Harris issued her report of girls’ canning work in Florida, tracking the growth of the program. Harris noted that twelve counties had active clubs in 1912, followed by thirteen in 1913, and twenty-four in 1914. By 1913, more than 500 girls were enrolled in canning clubs. On the eve of Smith-Lever, Harris was looking beyond canning clubs, however. In her recommendations for the 1914-1915 program of work, the future home demonstration leader named two major needs to keep the work moving forward. First, Harris argued it was necessary to continue Extension Schools, not only in high schools, but through homes and women’s clubs. Second, Harris called for a series of bulletins addressing not only canning, but nutrition, home care for the sick, lighting in rural homes, and home sanitation. Harris had outlined a significant home demonstration program, even before such an initiative officially existed.⁷

⁶Bradford Knapp, *Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work. State of Florida. Annual Report of Progress 1911* (FSU-1); J. J. Vernon, *Annual Report of Boys’ and Girls’ Club Work in Florida for 1912* (FSU-1).

⁷ Agnes Ellen Harris, *Report of Extension Division. Department of Home Economics. Florida State College for Women 1914* (FSU-1).

As home demonstration matured, the number of agents employed increased steadily. Not unexpectedly, there were spikes in appointments in certain periods, particularly World War I, when emergency funds made additional work possible. As the total number of HDAs increased, however, the numbers of black agents remained steady, at around twelve. The contrast in extension provided for white and black rural families was most pronounced after World War II, when the total number of agents exceeded the total number of counties in the state. Certain counties, like Hillsborough, Duval, and Dade, accumulated assistant agents, often as many as four or five. But the number and distribution of black HDAs remained low and concentrated in the Panhandle, where most of the state's African-Americans lived. Nevertheless, home demonstration work was predominantly for white and black rural women, but eventually there were other variations. During World War I and the 1918 influenza epidemic, home demonstration added discrete urban agents to extend a massive canning effort among city women and to treat flu victims at military bases in Jacksonville and Miami. Though urban women would continue to play an increased role in home demonstration over the next few decades, there were no other significant variations in home demonstration clientele until the 1950s. Then, in 1958, home demonstration work among Seminoles began in Glades County.

See the chart on page 25 for an overview of the number and type of agents working in Florida between 1915 and 1960, with additional years in which agent numbers were remarkably high. The total number of agents includes all work with white, black, Seminole, and urban families by representative county and assistant agents. It does not include state staff or specialists. Urban agents are noted when they are listed separately in the personnel roster of each published report of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service. After 1945, a number

of Florida counties were predominantly urban, so any agent working there would be, by default, “urban.”

The administrative structure of home demonstration did not change substantially between 1915 and 1960. Except for the addition of more specialists, the state home demonstration staff consisted of a white State HDA in charge of all home demonstration work, a black District HDA in charge of Negro home demonstration work, and a set of three to four white district agents who oversaw directly all HDAs working in that district’s counties. The first major administrative overhaul came in 1963, when both the location and titles of home demonstration staff were changed to reflect the impact of integration and the broader civil rights movement. Home demonstration agents came to be called Extension Home Economists, and all Negro home demonstration work was moved from Florida A&M University to Florida State University to take the place of the white home demonstration staff that had been moved from Florida State to University of Florida, the extension headquarters. In time, the program became increasingly specialized and officious. Eventually, the Extension Service was fully integrated, and Extension Home Economics became Family and Consumer Sciences. Generally, after 1960 home demonstration underwent tremendous surface changes, but lost depth. Before 1960, the program remained relatively static on the surface, but was characterized by great depth in the nature of its work.

To date, few histories concerned with home demonstration have dealt with the program in Florida. In 1982, Barbara Cotton published a slim volume analyzing the work of black extension work in Florida between 1915 and 1965. Cotton’s work, *The Lamplighters*, delved into the lives and work of individual agents in a way that emphasized both their personal struggles and triumphs. Lynne Rieff’s 1995 dissertation, “Rousing the People of the Land,” dealt with five states she termed the Deep South, including Alabama, Georgia,

Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida. Though Rieff touched on most of the important topics related to home demonstration, her broad geographic base meant that Florida appears only intermittently in her analysis. Still, Rieff's work remains important for its attention to a state so often overlooked. The next work dealing with home demonstration was my own 1999 thesis, "To Make the Best Better," which focused upon three counties in the Florida panhandle.⁸ Simply put, a full-length study based in Florida is tilling still-fertile soil.

In dealing with home demonstration, I am approaching it from the opposite direction many historians have taken. Rather than faulting home demonstration for not having done enough, or having pushed the "right" reforms, I contend that home demonstration did a great deal, and great deal of good. It is because HDAs did so much that was worthwhile that their subsequent evolution into something less hearty is disappointing. Thus, I am not seeking in the dissertation to undo a certain argument, and though there are many studies whose conclusions bear upon my own analysis of home demonstration, I am most interested in those major works that have directly influenced my understanding, those that either I accept and want to build upon or those that I will challenge.

Much of women's history has been written with an eye toward power inequities and female protest. Rural women's history, so distinct from the experiences of urban women, has been left out of feminist analysis, but a number of rural scholars have identified forms of empowerment, protest, and even feminism within the rural woman's experience. Deborah Fink has found in Nebraska that reform could be empowering, not limiting. Her 1992

⁸ See Barbara R. Cotton, *The Lamplighters. Black Farm and Home Demonstration Agents in Florida, 1915-1965* (Tallahassee: USDA in cooperation with Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1982); Lynne Rieff, "Rousing the People of the Land": Home Demonstration Work in the Deep South, 1914-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, Auburn University, 1995); Rieff also has dealt with Florida extension in essay form. See Lynne Rieff, "Improving Rural Life in Florida: Home Demonstration Work and Rural Reform, 1912-1940," in *Making Waves. Female Activists in Twentieth-Century Florida*, eds. Jack E. Davis and Kari Frederickson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003). Kelly Minor, "'To Make the Best Better': Home Demonstration in Escambia, Holmes and Okaloosa Counties, Florida, 1920-1940" (Master's thesis, University of West Florida, 1999).

Agrarian Women examines women's unprecedented role in rural reforms. Fink deals with actual extension work only intermittently, but her overall argument indicates that by the early twentieth-century, women finally were being included in agrarian reform as vital actors, not afterthoughts. Though agrarianism had long been a male-dominated philosophy, by the time that the Country Life Movement developed its survey of rural America it was women's satisfaction with farm life that reformers had come to see as the linchpin in rural revitalization. Ultimately, the demand for women reformers to meet women's needs laid the groundwork for the debates that culminated in Smith-Lever and women's extension as a discrete component of the Cooperative Extension Service. Women's overt inclusion in reform was a definite good, but Fink does not necessarily find that female extension work was welcome among Nebraska families. In fact, where extension appears in *Agrarian Women*, agents often seem an annoyance, like a nosy neighbor with too much time on her hands.⁹

Outside the Midwest, other historians have found evidence that reforms were at best uneven and, at worst, damaging to the precarious balance of life in farm communities. Often, historians have linked the impact of reform to the conditions of life for rural families. For example, Rebecca Sharpless' study of Texas cotton farms, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices* (1999), details the lives of women in a "reality that was bleak for many." Home demonstration, Sharpless argues, failed to effectively serve rural Texas women because it did not adequately address their needs.¹⁰ Sharpless's argument is one of those with which I am least comfortable, because it deals so heavily with absolutes. The absence of comprehensive improvement does not necessarily mean comprehensive failure. And it is vital to consider what home demonstration did accomplish, and, most importantly, what it could accomplish.

⁹ Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 11-24, 25-26.

¹⁰ Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices. Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xviii-xix, 4-5.

Local circumstances in the South also provide greater insight into the realm of possibility within which extension agents worked. For example, black HDAs working in Alabama enjoyed the financial and social support that proximity to and cooperation with Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee afforded them, but that was not the case for all black extension agents elsewhere. Texas extension, the subject of Debra Reid's 2000 dissertation "Reaping a Greater Harvest," made its own way toward building a reputation and seizing opportunities for reform. Though every agent was not in a position to realize just the reforms she would have liked, Texas extension was part of a larger reform effort among rural African-Americans that included private organizations like the Farmers' Improvement Society of Texas. Reid argues that black agrarian reformers found they could make greater progress because they "devised strategies that white progressives could support, but that did not threaten engrained southern race relations." The result was that progress *within* the segregated system was made, but progress in weakening the system itself was stymied. Part of what constricted these reformers' work was their conscious choice to represent it and carry it out in such a way that it did not draw undue attention from white critics, but that effort to get anything done at all meant that all that might have been possible was severely curtailed.¹¹ Clearly, HDAs' and rural women's experience with reform-based empowerment was not uniform. Such a condition only reflects the diversity of experience in the relationship between the agents and the women. A case in point is the introduction, advocacy, and adoption of technologies.

In virtually all work on rural Americans in the twentieth century, and earlier for that matter, technological change figures prominently. In the twentieth century, technological change took on a more "official" tone, stemming from government programs rather than from

¹¹Debra A. Reid, "Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, Agrarian Reform, and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2000), abstract.

simple market innovation.¹² The Extension Service, Rural Electrification Administration, and Tennessee Valley Authority exemplify the kind of top-down technology drive moving into rural America. Naturally, the acceptance or rejection of gadgetry for the home played a role in rural women's relationship with HDAs. One of the most interesting questions is why women purchased the appliances they did, what kept them from buying more, and what ultimately convinced them certain items were "must haves." The record of home demonstration in Florida suggests that women purchased what they could afford, and they prioritized those purchases. Katherine Jellison might argue, however, that to whatever extent home demonstration transformed rural homes, it was at the expense of much-needed income, and the result of unrealistic and ill-timed pressure agents put on rural families. However, in *Entitled to Power*, Jellison does argue that rural women rejected the brand of domesticity pushed at them by home agents, and its electrical trappings. Whatever they did adopt was meant to enhance their productive, rather than consumptive, roles.¹³ Though Jellison is more critical of home demonstration's motives than I have been, her analysis of women's ultimate control over what changes home demonstration wrought mesh with what occurred between Florida HDAs and rural women.

Kathleen Babbitt's 1995 dissertation, "Producers and Consumers," deals specifically with the ways that rural women in New York struggled to adapt to changes in their productive roles prompted by industrialization in the dairying industry. Though many critics point to conflicts between HDAs and rural women as a result of different standards of production and

¹² For examples of the impact of technology in earlier eras, see Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), Sally McMurry, "American Rural Women and the Transformation of Dairy Processing, 1820-80," *Rural History* 5 (1994): 143-53, and Catherine E. Kelly, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women's Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹³ Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

consumption, and generally assign responsibility to government intrusion, middle-class snobbery or some such generalization, Babbitt locates the conflict in women's specific attempts to continue providing for their families by seeking wage-earning opportunities. Babbitt argues that, ultimately, rural women found ways to satisfy both HDAs' apparently unrealistic demands for greater consumption and women's own need and desire to provide more tangibly for their families.¹⁴ Babbitt's interpretation of home demonstration and rural women provides yet another local variation. The conflicts she finds between agents and women regarding saleable production in New York is virtually absent in Florida, where HDAs encouraged women outright to produce handicrafts, jams, baked goods and other tourist-friendly goods to sell to the travelers flooding into the state. The relationship between women and HDAs clearly was not uniform, and certainly more flexible than some critics have contended, either because the women refused to be persuaded by an intractable agent, or because the agent was not so intractable. Three studies highlight the same local determinism I have found to prevail in Florida.

Rural historians have been quick to note that translating national, university-based home economics into meaningful reform and information for rural women tested the education as much as the women. Mary Hoffschwelle examines home demonstration's impact in Tennessee in "'Better Homes on Better Farms'" (2001), finding that women's acceptance of reform was a multi-step process; Tennessee women exerted the same selective resistance that Midwestern women did. Agents could sell household changes more effectively when they linked them to a broader consumer culture, and even then rural women adopted only what they wanted and could use from the wide selection of reforms agents offered them. Hoffschwelle

¹⁴ Kathleen R. Babbitt, "Producers and Consumers: Women of the Countryside and the Cooperative Extension Service Home Economists, New York State, 1870-1935" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1995), abstract. See also Babbitt's article "The Productive Farm Woman and the Extension Home Economist in New York State, 1920-1940," *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 83-101.

also points out that domestic reform was not a uniform program once it moved into specific communities, and she stresses that women forged a dynamic relationship with reformers in that they found ways to utilize new techniques and maintain their relationship to household and farm work.¹⁵

Ann McCleary's 1996 study of one Virginia County, "Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman," is remarkable not only for its attention to local reality rather than national agendas but also her determined effort to compensate for what she argues are shortcomings in earlier work on home demonstration. In particular, McCleary contends that historians critical of home demonstration have depended on a top-down approach, favoring the "official" message at the expense of any number of local ones. McCleary chronicles the relationship between historians and their primary arguments against home demonstration, including its constrictive gender ideals, its promotion of household technologies, its inattention to existing communities, its use of "insensitive and paternalistic" agents to fix what never was broken, and the hostility that agents created between rural women and themselves. McCleary differs markedly from others in her interpretation by directly contesting the prevailing analysis of home demonstration as social control. "What these stories overlook," she argues, "is why rural women participated as club members and as agents."¹⁶ Indeed, women's deliberate participation in home demonstration should be one of the key components of any analysis. As a decisive local factor, women's voluntary participation in home demonstration in Florida confirms what McCleary has discovered in Virginia. Indeed, as Chapter 3 will demonstrate,

¹⁵ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, "'Better Homes on Better Farms': Domestic Reform in Rural Tennessee," *Frontiers* 22 (January 2001): 51-53. See also her *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Ann McCleary, "Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman: Home Demonstration Work in Augusta County, Virginia, 1917-1940," (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1996), 3-4, 7-12.

local women were *conscious* of the influence they had over installing, maintaining, or eliminating home demonstration in their communities.

Lu Ann Jones' *Mama Learned Us to Work* (2002) delivers perhaps the most nuanced understanding of home demonstration so far. In her story of Southern rural women, she does not discount the prevailing criticisms of home demonstration. But the everyday reality, according to Jones, is that of a "protean" relationship, of top-down reform whose success depended upon "support from the bottom up." Jones agrees with critics that HDAs promoted apparently middle-class, urban, aesthetic styles, but contends that they did so in a way that reflected rural realities of resources and economics (much like the orange crate furniture that was so common in Florida). Most importantly, Jones reiterates a point that few other historians dealing with home demonstration have made—women accepted and rejected home demonstration as they saw fit. Moreover, "agents and club members collaborated in writing the texts of lessons when they came together at club meetings. To foster interest and retain membership, agents consulted with clubwomen as they set annual agendas of lessons to be studied."¹⁷ What I have studied of home demonstration in Florida bears out these three analyses. Federal objectives were but a starting point, and they were hardly absolute. Thus, the stream of thought on how HDAs and rural women interacted stretches from a relationship in which women had little say except rejection to one in which women actively shaped both the relationship and the wider home demonstration program. The best way to understand how home demonstration worked, of course, is to study it on the ground.

What then can Florida tell us about home demonstration? Home demonstration was still a national program that required the same reports of all its agents, arranged funding in roughly the same way everywhere, employed county, district, and state agents in each state,

¹⁷ Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 18-22, 141.

and provided the overall annual objectives for agents nationwide. In every state, successful agents were attuned to local interests, and the unsuccessful ignored or misjudged local influence. In every state, relative wealth differed among counties, as did interest in reform. Therefore, Florida HDAs' experiences were not necessarily exceptional. What Florida offers is a convenient, appropriate, and rich local story to help illuminate the bigger home demonstration narrative, particularly the experience and impact of localism. And Florida's experience helps answer the questions underlying the dissertation—how did home extension endure as long as it has, and what has been the price of longevity?

Uncle Sam wants YOU to hang curtains! That is the scenario I had in mind when I first began studying home demonstration for my Master's thesis. Like many historians who have examined HDAs' work, I approached it as evidence of a white, urban, middle-class juggernaut steamrolling a distinct, superior rural culture until it was battered and softened enough to remold into the faulty but preferred (i.e. white, urban, middle-class) form of American family life. With such a presumption uppermost, the picture of home demonstration that emerged was one of know-it-all, biased, uppity agents invading rural hamlets to impose the will of the government, shaming good, middling folk into changing their lifeways and dismissing good, poor folk as hopeless cases.

My opinion of these women has changed considerably over the years, however, and I no longer subscribe to this thesis. I came to realize that there were significant contradictions and complexities in the analysis I described above. For instance, one consistent criticism of home demonstration has been that it ignored the poorest, most isolated people who stood to gain the most from education and assistance. Even if that were true, what help could an agency supposedly devoted to superficial standards of "uplift" possibly offer folks whose primary needs were in health or finance? Other historians have argued that home

demonstration had potential value, but then essentially dismissed it because of its gender, racial, or class inequities.

Home demonstration did what it did—not necessarily what it could have done, and certainly not always what modern historians wish it had done. Attention to national standards and local desires had to remain paramount. Because funds often were raised from local tax dollars, it was rare that home demonstration could operate in a county where local support was lacking. Second, all participation in home demonstration programs was 100 percent voluntary. As Lu Ann Jones puts it, “women themselves were always free to vote with their feet.”¹⁸ Indeed, home demonstration never did grow to the size it might have had participation been coerced in some way. Third, there is ample evidence that even the particular phases of work women and HDAs undertook year to year were determined by the participants’ preference, not a mandate from the USDA.

And to a degree, critics have been correct; home demonstration did have some serious flaws. The program was segregated by both race and sex until the 1960s (a practical hindrance as well as an ideological one); it was chronically under-funded (at all levels); agent turnover typically was high; and pay was low. Assuming it had been better equipped to do so, home demonstration *might* have reached and influenced a majority of rural women, of all ethnic backgrounds. As it was, however, the majority of rural women were not involved in home demonstration, though it is impossible to know how many learned something from a friend who had learned it in home demonstration. On top of all these internal weaknesses were contextual factors home demonstration could not control, such as poor transportation and communication resources.

¹⁸ Jones, *Mama Learned Us*, 18.

Above all, home demonstration suffered most from the threat of obsolescence, in that it had been created to improve farm life for women and children so that they would feel more inclined to stay on the farm and thus reverse the swells of rural folk who were moving to more urban areas. Even by 1920, that mission was slightly shy of a lost cause, for census data indicated that, for the first time in American history, more Americans were urban than were rural. Again, home demonstration *might* have made some demographic difference, but possible and probable were well removed from one another, and home demonstration was presumably working to correct a problem it had neither the time nor the resources to effectively change. Given these conditions, it seems even more plausible that, like many reform movements or programs, home demonstration would have collapsed decades ago. But home demonstration's persistent efforts to adapt, negotiate, and evolve kept the whole home extension machine going. Beyond the basics of improvement, that attention to change has both benefited female rural reform, and cost it.

Though there were a number of reform efforts and agencies, including the Country Life Commission, that acknowledged rural women's needs, it was home demonstration that truly went out to meet rural women on their turf, and not just white women but also their even more neglected black sisters. Ignored by urban-based feminists, slighted by agriculture-oriented extension agents, and often misunderstood by historians with contemporary standards and expectations, rural women have not had many options for expressing their voice. Home demonstration was one way for them to do just that, because HDAs were in place precisely to hear and speak for women when no one else would listen. Coverage and aid were neither complete nor perfect, and seldom equitable, but home demonstration did a great deal more to acknowledge and attempt to assist rural women than any other program or commission.

It was not necessary for home extension to change as it did in order to survive, however, for today the world over there are grassroots endeavors that seek to build a place for women in the modern context of rural reform. So as to recognize its accomplishments and critique its failings, it is crucial to place reforms like home demonstration in a much broader context than historians have been wont to do, not limiting rural reform to American Southern history or American rural history. One of home demonstration's real strengths was not that it was exceptional in the world, but that it was linked to similar important reforms worldwide, in its infancy and today. The Associated Country Women of the World, founded in 1933, of which home demonstration was a part, maintains its commitment to uniting and assisting rural women in every corner of the world; it is today the largest international organization of rural women. Selling Women's Stuff is one of several initiatives that focus on helping African women farmers cope with lean seasons by coordinating the sale of their handcrafted items. The woman who won 2004's Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathia, has focused her work on facilitating peace by empowering rural women and preserving the environment they, and we, depend on.

The single theme that pervades this dissertation is dynamism, manifested as both context and choice—local, state, national, and global trends, and how HDAs chose to respond to them. That response, in turn, determined home demonstration's legacy. What emerges is, I believe, an interpretation of home demonstration reminiscent of Rebecca Sharpless' apt title—fertile ground, narrow choices. What HDAs were best at, however historians have interpreted them, was making more out of a little. How they did so is what allowed them to endure in an often imprecise role for nearly a century, and what initiated home demonstration's loss of vitality. Home demonstration was adaptable and organic, both of its own accord and under the influence of rural women's own autonomy. Agents came to rural counties trained in home

economics, hired by the federal government, and charged with a catalog of official reforms and program procedures. But once they set up shop among their clients, their work was anything but uniform or standard. Depending upon where they were stationed and among whom they worked, agents contended with a variety of cultural, linguistic, environmental, political, and economic pressures. Ever attuned to their own precarious position in a community, HDAs shaped their ideals to meet local need. The eventual cost of such adaptation is only more profound because, in the beginning, HDAs were so determined to carry on a tradition that allowed them to do such good.

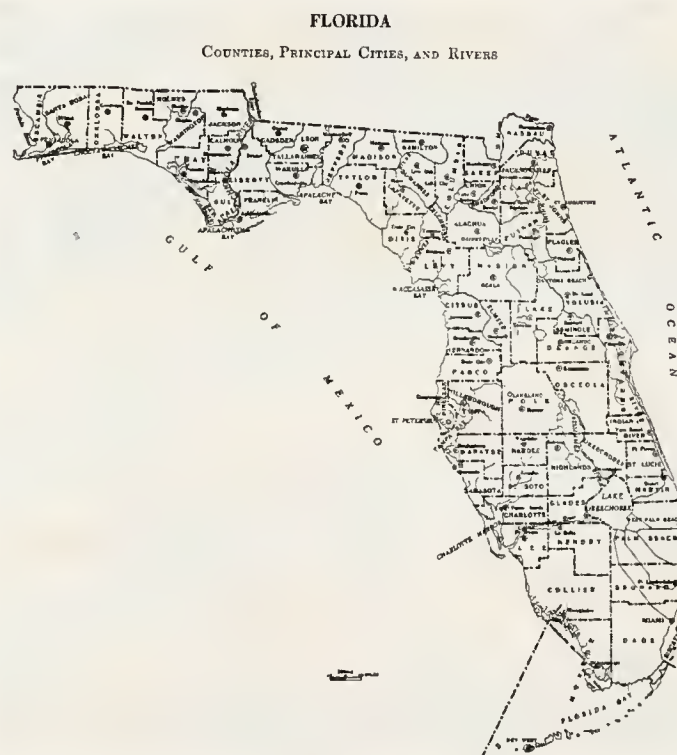


Figure 1-1. Map of 1930 Florida and its counties. Source: United States, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1932), 663.

YEAR	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	SEMINOLE	URBAN
1915	23	23	N/A	N/A	N/A
1917	41	33	N/A	N/A	8
1918	64	44	15	N/A	5
1919	51	33	18	N/A	N/A
1920	44	35	9	N/A	N/A
1925	34	26	8	N/A	N/A
1930	33	26	7	N/A	N/A
1935	44	36	8	N/A	N/A
1940	49	41	8	N/A	N/A
1945	53	43	10	N/A	N/A
1950	66	54	12	N/A	N/A
1955	79	67	12	N/A	N/A
1960	101	88	12	1	N/A

Figure 1-2. Number and type of home demonstration agents employed in Florida, 1915-1960. Source: Florida Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1915-1961.

CHAPTER 2

ROOTS THAT RUN DEEP: HOME DEMONSTRATION'S REFORM PEDIGREE

In 1797, Finland recognized the Women's Agricultural Organization, making it the first recorded organization of farm women. In the late nineteenth century, farm women in Canada, Germany, Scandinavia and the United States organized themselves into simultaneous but separate coalitions to address their own concerns. In Canada, the impetus for organization was tragic—Adelaide Hoodless called for farm women to come together for domestic training after her own baby died from contaminated milk. So, when O. B. Martin, an associate of Seaman Knapp's and an early extension historian, explained in 1921 that women's extension programs were "a new and developing work. . . . Perhaps a hundred years may elapse before the novelty and freshness wear away," he was mistaken.¹ The Smith-Lever version of home demonstration might have been new, but agrarian reform aimed at and led by women was anything but novel. It is telling that HDAs themselves seemed to position themselves in time by tracing their roots to a period well before anything we might assume as a starting point. A pioneer HDA, Kate Hill of Texas, named the woman whom "tradition has established as the first home demonstration agent," the Biblical Dorcas. In Dorcas, who sewed, and taught other women to sew "under her skillful tutelage," Hill sees the "prototype of the modern home demonstration agent, who sews and teaches others to sew, who helps to meet problems of feeding the family, who assists in teaching how to beautify the home . . . , and who assists in

¹ *An Official History of the National Extension Homemakers' Council, Inc. 1930-1990* (Burlington, KY: The Council, 1991), 171; O. B. Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1921), 135.

problems of family living and of recreation so that all family members may be more adequate citizens.”² Hill may be dramatic, but her point is well-taken.

The traditions that inspired and shaped home demonstration in the twentieth century emerged long before. Indeed, home demonstration’s durability, in part, came from its rich background. Extension, and home demonstration with it, did not emerge in the early twentieth century as a sudden, novel swell of reform fervor. Rather, they had been evolving over time, and in many places, as agrarian reformers and innovators sought ways to get their message to the farming population. An important feature in home demonstration’s remarkable resilience is an extended, fluid, dynamic tradition of agrarian reform spanning two centuries that inspired, influenced and legitimized home demonstration, even before there was such a thing.

The world’s agriculture has evolved through four broad stages: prehistoric, historic through the Roman period, feudal and scientific.³ That last period, of scientific agriculture, appeared late and has not waned; in fact, it has only blossomed further as a period of rapid and marked change. The difference that prompted sudden and dramatic transformation after centuries of impasse was not need, or conditions, or creative genius, but what Peter McClelland calls a “willingness to innovate.”⁴ That mindset and agricultural context is part of

² Kate Adele Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1958), 5.

³ Speaking of increasingly scientific agriculture, a general overview of these stages can be found at the Advanced BioTech website, which has a History of Agriculture as part of its Soil, Plant and Crop Enhancement information. See www.adbio.com/science/agri-history.htm (12 August 2005). More traditional and thorough treatments of agricultural history that reach back beyond the Early Modern period include Ralph Whitlock, *A Short History of Farming in Britain* (London: John Baker, 1965); G.E. Fussell, *The Classical Tradition in West European Farming* (Rutherford, Madison and Teaneck, Great Britain: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972); Norman Scott Brien Gras, *A History of Agriculture in Europe and America* (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co., Publishers, 1925); and two more recent and outstanding works, *Chapters from the Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1500-1750. Volumes I-5*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Mauro Ambrosoli, *The Wild and the Sown. Botany and Agriculture in Western Europe, 1350-1850*, trans. Mary McCann Salvatorelli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴ Peter McClelland, *Sowing Modernity. America’s First Agricultural Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5.

the world that launched the Extension Service and with it, home demonstration. It is not necessary to trace the home extension lineage as far back as Dorcas in Joppa, but it is worthwhile to examine the evolution of agrarian innovation briefly in Early Modern Europe, where science and agriculture coalesced into a period of potential revolution, the fervor of which crossed the Atlantic into the colonies, through the Early Republic's agricultural societies and into the nineteenth century when agrarian reform became increasingly formalized.⁵

This extended process set an important precedent for Extension work, home demonstration in particular. It was not that reform by and for rural women was underway in the eighteenth century, but that as agrarian education evolved, it came closer and closer to acknowledging, then addressing and finally accepting women as part of its structure. To put a finer point on this chapter's contribution, let me enumerate some aspects of these antecedents that have an important bearing on home demonstration in Florida, that emerge from these antecedents: the democratization of agrarian reform, the continued presence of women (implicitly expected even when not explicitly addressed) in agrarian ventures, and the centuries-old relationship between science, experimentation and demonstration and the well-lived agrarian life. This chapter is about the momentum in agrarian reform that built up before home demonstration, as such, ever existed.⁶

⁵ I say "potential revolution" because those scholars who debate the timing and conditions of an Early Modern agricultural revolution have yet to come to an agreement on whether or not one took place, and if it did, when and where it did so. For a brief overview of the revolution debate, see Kelly Minor, "The 'principall and only means to ripen the fruit of new hopes': Husbandry Manuals and Parliamentary Enclosure in Early Modern England," *Alpata: A Journal of History* 1 (2004): 97-126.

⁶ This may sound like a terrible case of teleology, but I want to stress that I do not subscribe to the panacea of inevitability. In this case, there is nothing to demand that home demonstration would emerge as it did, when it did. What I want to stress is that once home demonstration did crystallize as a formal extension program, it had a built-in durability because the ideas that ultimately promoted it—better rural homes, women's direct involvement in rural well-being, rural efficiency, etc.—had been maturing for some time.

Perhaps the official inclusion of feminized agrarian reform in twentieth century endeavors like the Country Life Movement or institutions like the Cooperative Extension Service seems less remarkable if we cannot call it a sudden inspiration on the part of the reform leadership. However, placing home demonstration in the widest possible context helps anchor it more securely in the history of agrarian education and reform, and considerably improves our understanding of its longevity. Extension work crystallized in a dynamic, urgent period of rapid change and ambitious reform efforts. It was then a relatively short time until rural America ceased to be dominant in the national demographic. The combined force of reform exhaustion and a pragmatic loss of consequence, exacerbated by racial inconsistencies and often unrealistic goals, should have undermined, even collapsed, Extension work, especially among women, who struggled continuously to maintain funding, support and respect in a male profession plagued by limited resources. But Extension work did not collapse, even among women. Indeed, it evolved and carried forth. Why? Part of the answer is that home demonstration had been a long time coming.

The Early Modern period in Europe witnessed a dramatic infusion of science and education into agrarian lives, fueled by the Scientific Revolution and political debates about the future of the countryside.⁷ In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, husbandry was a mix of custom, fashion, experience and ingenuity. Innovation was limited to those with adequate financial security and time to absorb the risk of new methods advocated by strangers who had conducted tests on strange farms. That education of those interested in and/or

⁷ A fine example of the sort of heated debate that agricultural change could inspire is that over Parliamentary enclosure. The arguments sound familiar in the context of home demonstration; proponents considered enclosure as an improvement designed to make the best use of agrarian resources and keep the most promising farmers on the land while funneling others into alternate occupations. Opponents decried enclosure as a blow to customary independence and access to the commons, an incursion that alienated those most dependent on a farm living. The clashing sentiments of Arthur Young and William Cobbett are roundly echoed among early twentieth-century reformers and even amongst those who have composed scholarly study of Extension work and other federal rural programs. On these debates, see Minor, "The 'principall and only means.'"

employed in farming was to be a centerpiece of reform is evident in the flurry of husbandry manuals disseminated among learned men and profitable farmers. Over the course of the period, custom and tradition in husbandry decisions gave up ground to experiment and demonstration as learning and teaching tools.⁸ While most manuals dealt with bread and butter topics like manure, timber and furrows, a number paid particular attention to the sustenance of the rural home, if only to note sound architectural styles and orderly environs, and commented upon necessary improvements.

An early, familiar example of total-farm advice is Thomas Tusser's oft-cited manuals, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, first published in 1537. The book is a compilation of verse, a lyrical "to do" list for the farm and its surroundings. Tusser's advice is rare in that it dealt with the "huswife's" role specifically, making it clear that her participation and particular expertise were necessary for a farm's prosperity and security. Like HDAs four centuries later, Tusser laid out a precise calendar for the huswife that included all her duties, organized into monthly tasks. His aim was to prevent haphazard homemaking efforts that inevitably would fail, threatening the stability of the whole farm enterprise. Certainly, the pressure upon rural women to succeed as wives and mothers, bring honor upon a household and prove herself worthy of her station did not fade with time.

In addition to advice for women, later agricultural writers like Arthur Young devoted space to evaluating rural homes and outbuildings and calling for their uplift. In 1797, Young remarked on the sorry state of dwellings for smallholders compared to the great trouble taken to accommodate "men of large fortune." He admitted that the prior two decades had produced

⁸ As representatives of an evolving methodology in husbandry, good examples of the manual tradition include, first, a wave of agricultural writers whose advice still maintained a strong sense of custom and sentiment: Thomas Tusser, Conrad Heresbach, Gervase Markham and John Worlidge, writing between the 1550s and 1690s. The next major round of husbandry writers were, as I once said, short on philosophy, long on footnotes, and big on invention: William Ellis, Richard Bradley and Jethro Tull, writing between 1733 and 1758. See Minor, "The principall and only means."

improvement in farm houses, but that “they are still very inferior to what, it is to be hoped, they may become in some future period.”⁹ Interestingly, some advisors addressed specific methods of improvements around the farmstead, not just in the fields. In fact, their suggestions for garnering support for such campaigns are strikingly similar to those the Extension Service would employ centuries later. The prolific and popular agricultural advisor William Marshall named some means by which men of landed property could institute improvements on their estates, namely “by IMPROVING the MINDS of his TENANTS. By infusing among them a SPIRIT for IMPROVEMENT.” The person best equipped for such a task was one “who has a knowledge of rural affairs, and who possesses the goodwill and confidence of its tenantry.” He recommended that the trusted proprietor connect with tenants through personal attention, conversation and, significantly, by seeking out what he called “leading men,” those with great promise or the respect of their peers and using their improvements as examples to inspire or shame others into action.¹⁰ This is a significant precedent for an agency like the Extension Service that relied on personal interaction to effect change.

Even as Marshall focused upon those with the most resources at hand, he already was calling for a program that one day would extend education to the rural masses. In the late eighteenth century, he made proposals for a “Rural Institute, or College of Rural Economy.” Marshall argued, “Every other art, mystery, and profession, has the means of gaining initial instruction . . . while the art of agriculture,--more valuable, if not more difficult, than the rest

⁹ Arthur Young, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Suffolk* (London: Macmillan, 1797), 10.

¹⁰ William Marshall, *On the Landed Property of England, An Elementary and Practical Treatise . . .* (London: G. and W. Nicol, 1804), 301-03.

united, -- has been left to accidental tuition.”¹¹ Clearly, the foundation was laid and interest aroused for democratized reform. Thus, these works and advisors are not peripheral to this discussion. Rather, they indicate how much context existed for agrarian reform in the United States and how much agrarian change was linked to increasingly scientific demonstrations conducted by “experts.” And it is necessary to remember that much of the debate surrounding home demonstration work is a derivative of the same debates that dominated Early Modern agricultural thinkers and scientists—the meaning of the farm, the farm home, the whole countryside, in the grand scheme of national progress and posterity. Furthermore, colonial agricultural writers had read, corresponded with, referred to and even critiqued some of these men’s works, importing and then shaping agricultural education and experimentation to meet colonial agriculture’s needs.

Reformers seeking to extend agrarian education to more people found their cause travel-ready, especially across the Atlantic in the colonies, where notable agriculturists like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson lauded the prospect of agricultural extension. Washington wanted to see a national university with a chair of agriculture, and Jefferson conceived of a network of local agriculture societies charged with disseminating information.¹² Washington’s and Jefferson’s interests also were not novel, but were part of two trends that emerged in the colonial and early Republic periods regarding agrarian improvement, further democratization and discrete organization. Though neither would reach then the levels of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the process of both was clearly in motion. In 1748, Jared Eliot composed the first American husbandry manual, *Essays Upon Field Husbandry in New England*, as a serial. Over six issues between 1748 and 1759, he

¹¹ Marshall, *On the Landed Property*, 431-32.

¹² Barbara Cotton, *The Lamplighters. Black Farm and Home Demonstration Agents in Florida, 1915-1965* (Tallahassee: United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, 1982), 9-10.

both emulated and departed from his contemporaries in England; he urged that husbandry techniques be adapted to the specific resources and needs of the colonies. Like other agricultural writers, he struggled to expand his audience, frustrated that so many learned folk continued to dismiss agricultural writing as either mean or unnecessary. Eliot argued that neither was the case. Intellectual pursuits about agriculture had been good enough for Solomon, Cato and Virgil, and they were certainly worthy of the time and attention of the men around him. Furthermore, he pointed out that the colonies were woefully behind in paying due attention to agricultural improvement by establishing societies and journals for that purpose. Not only England, but Scotland and Ireland, had established agrarian societies, “Pens and Hands are set to Work . . . and the whole Kingdom feel the Advantage of this fine Institution.” Eliot predicted, “if something of this Nature were set on Foot in this Country, it might be of Advantage.”¹³ To that end, he sought to make his own work as accessible as possible, so that men who were not members of the many learned societies that did embrace agriculture might still learn of improved methods and benefit by them.

Eliot did not shy from critiquing other, well-respected agrarian writers, preferring to laud experience rather than prestige. Though learned men interested in agriculture punctuated their rhetoric with classical agrarian wisdom, Eliot demurred, calling Cato’s work on Roman husbandry “a better piece of Poetry than a Book of Husbandry.”¹⁴ This bold depreciation of classical advice was not limited to the antique. Eliot reported having read all the English husbandry manuals and having been familiar with a number of their authors. Though he respected their work, he nevertheless believed that their style limited their effectiveness. In

¹³ Jared Eliot, *Essays Upon Field Husbandry in New England* . . . (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1760), 2, 3, 68.

¹⁴ Eliot, *Essays Upon Field Husbandry*, 28. He did, however, add a footnote to his criticism: “The above is not said to depreciate the Character or derogate from the Merits of that truly great Man; for a great deal of our present Husbandry is justly called *Virgiling*.”

particular, he criticized Jethro Tull's language as serving only to exclude a good portion of those who might benefit from his experience. Quoting a passage carefully selected for its obtuseness, Eliot remarked "Mr. Tull has had but little Regard to the Capacity of his Reader: Nor will it be much better understood than if it had been wrote in an unknown Tongue, here being so many words used by him which common Farmers do not understand." The real shame, Eliot continued, was that Tull "seems to me to have entered deeper into the true Principles of Husbandry, than any Author I have ever read. Had he taken Pains to accommodate himself to the Unlearned, his Book would have been much more useful than now it is." In contrast to what Eliot called Tull's "pompous Parade of Learning," he deliberately wrote in "plain Stile" to reach out to farmers beyond the exclusive circles of leaned societies, "sensible, that the low Stile, the Plainness and Simplicity of these Essays, has exposed them to the Centure of those who do not well consider for whom they are intended and written."¹⁵ Eliot was extending the circle of agricultural education to take in those whom other writers had only assumed would benefit, in time, from the examples of their economic betters. This sort of expanded access was a key component of all manner of agrarian extension and education.

Examining this period of burgeoning extension work with a historian's hindsight, Margaret Rossiter agrees that a shift was taking place in the manner of agricultural education and reform. Through the 1830s or so, agricultural reform was *slowly* becoming both more democratic and more organized. In fact, those conditions were mutually reinforcing. Before 1820, agricultural improvement was a consideration of the wealthy, men with time to spend and money to risk experimenting with potential improvement. As a result, innovation came to be linked with particular names, even regions—Samuel H. Black, John Taylor of Caroline,

¹⁵Eliot, *Essays Upon Field Husbandry*, 99, 4.

Stephen McCormick and, later, David Dickson, Wade Hampton and John C. Jenkins—rather than movements.¹⁶ In the South and in the North, locally known estate owners used their own lands to develop and test theories and then shared the results with their peers. In the rapidly growing West, Hardy W. Campbell employed similar methods to develop what came to be called “Campbell dry farming,” and made Western farming viable.¹⁷

Despite interest among such learned men and their existing societies, agriculture did not yet have its own societies, though it was a regular topic of conversation and publication. Such groups as the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1768 and 1780 respectively, offered the first “organized agricultural improvement in the United States.” Rossiter argues that though these societies may not have revolutionized agricultural practice, they do reveal “a genuine interest in agriculture . . . , but a very naïve impression of how to go about improving it.” Soon after, the first specifically

¹⁶Margaret W. Rossiter, “The Organization of Agricultural Improvement in the United States, 1785-1865,” in *The Pursuit of Knowledge in the Early American Republic. American Scientific and Learned Societies from Colonial Times to the Civil War*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and Sanborn C. Brown (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 279; Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer. The Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 4-5, 6. All but Black were Southerners; not until after the Civil War did the North take the lead in agricultural innovation (Scott, 7). It is worth noting, however, since we are discussing democratization of agrarian reform, that the South was not a bastion of *cohesive* innovation prior to 1860. This was true for slaveholding areas in particular. Charles Steffen argues, regarding the South Carolina Lowcountry, that Southern agricultural reform lacked precisely the element that I argue sustained agrarian reform into the twentieth century – “momentum.” There were “many moves, but no movement.” Steffen explains the inertia as “a relatively limited circle of men . . . [who] could agree on what they wanted but not how to get it.” The issue? Was leadership to come from “planter paternalism or white democracy”? Real change depended upon mass education, but elite associations of men, predicated on white supremacy, precluded inclusivity. Thus, the organizations, journals and advisors known in the North never developed in the antebellum South beyond episodic fevers of reform efforts. See Charles G. Steffen, “In Search of the Good Overseer: The Failure of the Agricultural Reform Movement in Lowcountry South Carolina, 1821-1834,” *Journal of Southern History* 58 (November 1997): 753-756. This phenomenon makes sense in light of the reforms I describe above, especially those prior to 1820, when the South outpaced the North by producing a good many ideas and innovators, but only as a series of swells rather than a steady wave. The North, on the other hand, produced a steadier, if more concentrated, agricultural reform culture. This trend also contributes to my sense that agrarian reform was continually evolving, moving toward an eventual inclusiveness, even in the South.

¹⁷ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 8.

agricultural societies emerged, the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture in 1785 and South Carolina Society for Promoting and Improving Agriculture, both in 1785, followed by similar organizations in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut and Kentucky.¹⁸ But these early societies still comprised an elite membership without an effective means of communicating information widely.

The problem was two-fold. First, agricultural reforms and experiments were best characterized as what Russell Lord calls “spontaneous agricultural extension.”¹⁹ Until the mid-nineteenth century, agricultural education was haphazard, with neither the funding nor the infrastructure to support an effective widespread movement. In 1760, Jared Eliot had called for the publication of some sort of annual report compiling the successful improvements farmers had undertaken, and in 1796, President Washington, himself an agricultural innovator, urged Congress to establish an office to promote American agriculture. As the nation grew, he argued, “the culture of the soil more and more [must be] an object of public patronage.”²⁰ By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, there still was no American counterpart to the British Board of Agriculture and no far-reaching agricultural publication, so members of learned societies simply reported their trials and successes to their respective peers.²¹ The second problem is related to this organizational and communication deficit, and that is the demographic composition of agricultural improvers.

¹⁸Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 9-10.

¹⁹Russell Lord, *The Agrarian Revival. A Study of Agricultural Extension* (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1939), 20.

²⁰ Wayne Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People. Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 17.

²¹ Rossiter, “The Organization of Agricultural Improvement,” 284, Eliot, *Essays Upon Field Husbandry*, 17.

As Jared Eliot supposed, the average society member and the average American farmer were not the same man. Members of learned societies were, in the main, prominent and wealthy men with an urban occupation and a country estate, both in New England. They were educated and well-read (hence, the numerous nods to Cato and Virgil). However, certain important factors were reshaping who improved and the information they expected. In turn, the new kind of reformer propelled a shift toward a more distinct agricultural structure, increased federal and state involvement in agriculture, and eventually, another significant expansion of agricultural democracy. Basically, science launched this shift with the introduction of new findings in agricultural chemistry and related subjects, creating a grassroots demand among the agricultural public for “scientific expertise from its journals, societies and government,” which supported some new, but relatively few, positions for agricultural scientists. This, Rossiter believes, promoted the enhanced “democratization and ‘professionalization’ of agricultural improvement,” shifting the power base from gentlemen to everymen, who in turn formed an “active self-interested lobbyist group.” Since traditional learned societies could neither keep pace with these changes nor meet the needs of an expanded public, they were “bypassed” by those better suited to the new agrarian milieu.²²

Peter McClelland’s *Sowing Modernity* offers an important clue to the origins of extension philosophy and expectations by demonstrating that the work of Jared Eliot and other American agricultural writers preceded only slightly a boom beyond their most daring hopes. In the 1810s, American agriculture began what McClelland terms the first of many agricultural revolutions. Unlike historians analyzing such phenomena elsewhere, especially in Britain, McClelland identifies revolution not with an implement or a crop, but with an attitude. The revolution was a period in which “changes made in techniques and implements signaled a

²² Rossiter, “The Organization of Agricultural Improvement,” 279.

departure from methods that for generations had been largely unchanged because their use had been largely unquestioned.” For McClelland, the revolution erupted when a single question became “pervasive among American farmers”—“Is there a better way?” This “attitudinal transformation,” he says, occurred swiftly, in only two decades between about 1815 and 1830.²³ His time frame is spot on, since the early nineteenth century witnessed a veritable boom in agricultural education and a firm foundation for agricultural extension.

Agrarian reform became a hot topic in the nineteenth century because suddenly many people were seeking a “better way.” Agricultural societies flourished, agricultural literature launched a whole genre in the American canon and an agricultural infrastructure finally emerged to guide more steadily those in the throes of agricultural enthusiasm. In 1811, the Berkshire Agricultural Society was organized, a prototype of the localized agricultural societies most useful for mainstream farmers. It was succeeded by a number of new societies and agricultural fairs, the brainchildren of Elkanah Watson, between 1817 and 1825.²⁴ In 1838, proposals surfaced for the creation of a National Agricultural College (William Marshall’s ideas taking shape on this soil), and in 1852 the United States Agricultural Society formed. By 1860, more than 900 agricultural societies were active nationwide. While they remained largely a “boys’ club,” some sought to include women in their reform ideas. This effort to address deficiencies or wants in the farm home proved a valuable opening for including women in the coming Farmers’ Institute movement. For example, Amasa Walker outlined for the Worcester South Society in 1855 four basic goals for that organization as it went about rural education. First, he suggested that weekly farmers’ clubs should “discuss agricultural matters among themselves;” second, they should buy, read and discuss agricultural books; third, they should try to “establish a series of lectures on agriculture,

²³ McClelland, *Sowing Modernity*, ix-x.

²⁴ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 10.

agricultural chemistry and geology;" fourth, these clubs should conduct classes where young farmers could study agricultural textbooks. Significantly, Walker told his audience that women should be invited to all meetings and that some of the content should be aimed at their needs, such as discussions of butter making.²⁵

These groups were sharing their experiences with people and in ways their predecessors had not. Husbandry manuals continued to appear; notable among them was Edmund Ruffin's *Essays on Calcareous Manures* in 1832, based on his personal experiments with marl fertilizer on his Virginia plantation.²⁶ However, Ruffin's manual merged into an already busy agricultural publication stream, again with prominent men at the helm. The first American agriculture periodical, *Agricultural Museum*, appeared in 1810 and by 1840, a total of thirty farm journals with a circulation of more than 100,000 signaled the permanence of agriculture journalism in the United States.²⁷ Moreover, these widely circulated journals served as a vital conduit to carry information from experimental groups to farmers, exposing them to new ideas in their own language, proven results of meaningful experiments, and even examples from abroad, dwindling some of the innovation gap.²⁸

Most significant for the future Extension Service and home demonstration, this revolutionary period also accelerated the movement of two institutions into agricultural

²⁵ Alfred A. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States 1785-1923* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928), 5-6.

²⁶ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 5; USDA, History of American Agriculture, www.usda.gov/history2/text10.htm.

²⁷ Many significant journals followed *Agricultural Museum*, including *American Farmer* and *Plough Boy* in 1819, *New England Farmer* in 1822, *New York Farmer* and *Southern Agriculturist* in 1828, *Cultivator* in 1834, and *Union Agriculturist* and *Western Prairie Farmer* in 1841. USDA, History of American Agriculture. The thirty plus journals in circulation as of 1840 does not account for the many more short-lived publications which marked the period. Typical of early agricultural reform, there were many flares, but few long-burning developments. It is the steady stream, flares and otherwise, that concerns us here.

²⁸ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 20-21.

improvement – the state and colleges. By 1862, these had united to create land-grant universities, those that would serve as “base camps” for extension under the Morrill Act. As early as 1766, George Washington had suggested that Congress establish a National Board of Agriculture, but it was not until 1819 that such a body existed.²⁹ That year, New York’s state legislature established the state’s Board of Agriculture, the first of its kind. By 1820, as the groundswell of those newly interested in scientific agriculture increased, their lobbying power produced results in the federal government, first with an Agricultural Committee in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate in 1825. More prominent federal initiatives did not appear until 1862, but educational efforts continued to expand. Between 1825 and 1850, a number of schools and colleges, including Columbia, Brown, and Harvard, began offering science-based courses in agriculture, albeit unevenly, while in 1826, Maine launched the Lyceum movement.³⁰ The Gardiner’s Lyceum was the first agricultural school, where farmers enrolled in three years of instruction. It was a much-needed counterweight to the scattered and usually unsatisfactory agricultural education offered at existing universities. However, the Lyceum movement still could not overcome agrarian education’s fledgling status, hampered by farmer disinterest, academic snobbery and chronic underfunding.³¹ Then, in the midst of a much greater struggle, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law initiatives which finally would provide the support necessary to get agrarian improvement on firm footing, and extend it to an even wider audience, including women.

Absorbed with war worries, Lincoln nevertheless put pen to paper for two agrarian laws in 1862. One created the United States Department of Agriculture, as a cabinet-level

²⁹ See Lord, *The Agrarian Revival*, 24-25 on early support for state agricultural initiatives.

³⁰ USDA, History of American Agriculture, “Government Programs and Policy,” www.usda.gov/history2/text10.htm.

³¹ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 24-26.

position, and the second approved the Morrill Land-Grant Act. On July 2, the federal government granted eleven million acres of land to the states to create colleges for the purpose of building a better agrarian machine, to ““promote the arts and industries for a peace not yet in sight.”” Each college was to receive a \$5,000 annual grant and 30,000 acres per each Congressional representative.³² The idea was to stabilize and standardize the quality of and access to agricultural education, but the colleges’ early years were fraught with disappointments, as they were “badly housed and miserably endowed.”³³ The number of students actually enrolled in agriculture was abysmally low, and those that did attend to learn about the newest and best agricultural methods were often disappointed – there was neither the staff nor the expertise, nor even the science, to meet demand.

To make matters worse, the hostility toward agricultural education that had plagued earlier attempts to incorporate it into existing colleges continued. Farmers disliked the broad curriculum that instructed their sons in both vocational and more classical pursuits; classical professors at these “cow colleges” scoffed at anything as manually laborious as agriculture and professed to see little value in teaching it.³⁴ The faculty responsible for agrarian education, regardless of competence, suffered from a particularly unfavorable balance of work

³² Lord, *The Agrarian Revival*, 30; Gladys Baker, *The County Agent* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1939), 2; USDA, History of American Agriculture, “Agricultural Education and Reform;” Cotton, *The Lamplighters*, 10; Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 26-32, Donald B. Williams, *Agricultural Extension: Farm Extension in Australia, Britain and the United States of America* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968), 22..

³³ Lord, *The Agrarian Revival*, 31.

³⁴ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 27, 28-29. Part of the problem was a cultural divide. In one instance, visiting agriculturists to Clemson University complained of the poor treatment they received from faculty, and that ““few of the professors had shaved faces.”” Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 29. Clayton Ellsworth, recounting these early days of agricultural education in established universities, notes that the Country Life Commission’s chair, Liberty Hyde Bailey, experienced this same frustrating reception at Cornell University. Though Bailey was a renowned horticulturist by the time he joined Cornell’s faculty, he faced opposition from both farmers and collegians to agricultural education – farmers believed a college education was unnecessary to carry out their work and professors believed a College of Agriculture was an oxymoron. Clayton Ellsworth, “Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission,” *Agricultural History* 34 (1960): 157.

and compensation. Many colleges attempted to maintain agricultural studies with but one professor. Short on funds and students, colleges expected agricultural professors to be multifunctional, supplementing their primary teaching duties with managing the college's demonstration farm and teaching other courses more or less (usually less) related to agriculture.³⁵

To correct some of these deficits and expand the student base of the land-grants, Congress passed a second Morrill Act in 1890. There were some notable improvements in the system, at least on paper. To alleviate some of the economic strain on the colleges, annual grants were increased to \$15,000 with a gradual increase expected of up to \$25,000 per year. The most significant change was the introduction of federal funds to support land-grant education for blacks. In 1871, four Southern states had designated a portion of their grants for use by black colleges, but in no meaningful way had black agricultural education previously been provided for.³⁶ Even so, enrollment remained disappointing.

A partial explanation for the slow start in land-grant enrollment was competition. Farmers, and their wives, interested in learning more about their craft were attending in droves the increasingly popular Farmers' Institutes, begun in Massachusetts in 1863 on the heels of the Morrill Act. By 1899, all but one state offered Institutes, and most were sponsored by the state department of agriculture or state land-grant college. That year, more than 2,000 Institutes were held and more than a half million farmers attended them. These intensive seminars ran for two to five days, with morning and afternoons devoted to lectures on a

³⁵ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 32.

³⁶ Cotton, *The Lamplighters*, 11-12; Lord, *The Agrarian Revival*, 32.

variety of agricultural and homemaking topics. Evenings were a social time, filled with amusements deemed uplifting, such as recitations and music.³⁷

Throughout the Institutes' history, women participated. Though many farm women were reluctant to attend lectures, many other women were eager to give them. Women's speakers and sessions were not segregated from men's; female speakers shared the platform with men, at times speaking not on homemaking, but on agriculture. It is not necessarily surprising that male institute organizers welcomed, even encouraged, female participation; they believed that women in attendance lent delicacy and refinement to the movement, a perception once common in Victorian America.³⁸ With Institute successes underway, organizers looked for more direct ways to extend education to rural women, such as concurrent but separate cooking schools. In these classes, women learned much of what HDAs would undertake to teach similar women, including dietary needs and food analysis. In the late nineteenth century, several states began establishing women's clubs, "domestic science associations," to parallel their husband's societies. In patterns similar to home demonstration, these clubs worked by gathering together rural women within their own communities and working with them to improve some homemaking methods.³⁹

³⁷ Edmund deS. Brunner and H. Hsin Pao Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service. A History and Critique of the Cooperative Agricultural and Home Economics Extension Service* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949), 7-8; Clarence Beaman Smith and Meredith Chester Wilson, *The Agricultural Extension System of the United States* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1930), 28-31; *The Cooperative Extension Service*, ed. H.C. Sanders (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 13-14; Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, see chapters 3-4 for a detailed history of the development and fulfillment of the Institute movement, including the participation of women and youth; Cotton, *The Lamplighters*, 14; True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 14.

³⁸ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 117-119; True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 15, 17.

³⁹ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 118-20; True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 18, 35. On the continued development of Institutes after 1900, including the increased attention to children, see True, 32-41.

As they did for women, Institutes broadened agrarian education opportunities for rural African-Americans. In many cases, blacks were officially welcome at white institutes.⁴⁰ Black institutes benefited from a double source of funding and inspiration, for the legislated support provided by Morrill was backed by the ingenuity and commitment of Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington. Washington's concern that farmers who stood to benefit from agricultural education were not always able to attend traditional institutes helped launch his moveable schools, essentially institutes on wheels. The educators came to the farm families, an important precedent for extension work.⁴¹ Meanwhile, traditional institutes continued. In North Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky and Florida they were established specifically for black participants (both from segregated racial customs and the need for expanded audiences).⁴² In Florida, white institutes were held in Gainesville at University of Florida, while black farmers were required to attend the programs at the black land-grant, the State Normal College for Colored Students (today, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University) in Tallahassee. Its first Institutes, in four counties, began in 1902 with a \$600 grant from the legislature.⁴³

Paralleling but ever closer to intersecting land-grant colleges and institutes were some other, not yet formalized, developments in agrarian edification. Among these were the Chautauqua, founded at Chautauqua Lake, New York in 1874. Like Farmers' Institutes, Chautauqua extended extension, approaching the daily, hands-on access that the Extension

⁴⁰ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 115. Scott notes that resistance to black attendance tended to be based in Southern enclaves, in those places where sharecropping was most deeply entrenched. There, traditions of conservative agriculture based on a "'negro and mule'" prevailed and scientific farming could make little headway.

⁴¹ Cotton, *The Lamplighters*, 12, 14; Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 115-116.

⁴² Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 115.

⁴³ Cotton, *The Lamplighters*, 14.

Service brought to rural families. Then, at the turn of the century, children's inclusion in agricultural education grew into distinct clubs—corn for boys and, later, tomatoes for girls. These clubs were the direct predecessors of the 4-H program, the oldest and most familiar branch of the Extension system.⁴⁴ Finally, reformers hit upon another key idea, the agricultural experiment station. Though some agricultural colleges had been pursuing experiments since the colleges' inception, experiment stations offered a concentrated solution to a persistent problem—the dearth of science in scientific agrarianism. Experiment work began abroad, in 1851 in Saxony, followed by experiment stations in England and France and in some agricultural colleges in the United States.⁴⁵

By the 1880s, experiment stations were operating formally in fifteen states, developing the science that professors and demonstration agents later would take to their respective students. However, as had been true before, funding and organizational issues hampered progress. Educators and scientists looked to the state for funding and structure. The state responded with the Hatch Act, which passed in 1887 with little fuss. In effect, the Hatch Act enhanced the 1862 Morrill Act; it provided for the creation of a departmental agricultural experiment station in each land-grant college, funded by a \$15,000 annual grant. The purpose of the stations was to “aid in acquiring . . . useful and practical information . . . and to promote scientific investigation and experiment respecting the principles and applications of agricultural science.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 5-6; True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 65-68, 43; USDA History of American Agriculture, “Agricultural Education and Extension.”

⁴⁵ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 32. Once again, agrarian reform takes a transatlantic shape. In fact, agricultural colleges here were derivatives of a University extension system that operated through public libraries, a system which was itself inspired by similar ones in England, begun in 1866. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 43.

⁴⁶ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 33; Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 5.

Agrarian reform through education seemed at the threshold of a comprehensive system of extension. Thus far, improvement advocates had established “what” reform should do: educate, experiment, extend. Long ago, the issue of “why” had been raised—talk of national good, noble ploughmen, Jeffersonian democracy—but bureaucratic need long since had taken precedence over ideological musings (those would be resurrected in 1908 with the Country Life Movement). For centuries, reformers had been grappling with “how” to do what needed to be done, and they were very close to the answer. When seventy-year old Seaman Knapp crossed paths with a boll weevil in Texas, how to do the “what” fell into place.

To those connected in some way with the Cooperative Extension Service, Seaman Knapp is only slightly short of a modern messiah. A sample of testimonials from such people will suffice to demonstrate the extent to which Knapp is equated with rural salvation. In 1921, Oscar B. Martin, a proponent of extension education among children and women, published a work on Knapp detailing his “Contribution to Civilization.” As one of the world’s “great benefactors,” Knapp “loved the common man.” A.F. Lever, co-author of the 1914 Smith-Lever Act, introduced Martin’s book with his own commendation. It was in the “fertile brain” of the agricultural elder statesman that the demonstration method came to fruition, for which Knapp “stands out toweringly among a bare half dozen really great agricultural leaders in the history of our country.” That he was so successful is little cause for wonder, for Knapp was “a bold, aggressive, original thinker. His philosophy was tender and broadly sympathetic, filled throughout with the true missionary spirit of service.”⁴⁷ Russell Lord has described Knapp as a “practical man and a mystic,” a reformer “who went South to make money, but he could not

⁴⁷ Martin, *The Demonstration Work*, Preface, Introduction.

keep his mind on it . . . The men and women he directed literally worship his memory in the South.”⁴⁸ Apparently so.

Behind the story of every giant, though, is a smaller creature, this one a bug. Without the boll weevil, there may have been less urgency to propel Knapp’s work or inspire his followers’ devotion. In 1902, Knapp accepted an appointment to the United States Department of Agriculture, with the purpose of establishing some demonstration farms in the South. While at Iowa State College, Knapp had helped run some similar farms with success, but his experience in the South was less heartening. Demonstration farms were few and far between, minimizing their impact on surrounding communities. Knapp suggested a community demonstration farm, where that community chose its representative farmer. The farmer agreed to pay his own way, though he was insured against loss. The first farm established under this system was the Porter Community Demonstration Farm near Terrell, Texas. There in 1903 Porter experimented with proposed controls of an increasingly troublesome pest, the boll weevil, and the farm earned a sizable income from the advance methods employed under Knapp’s supervision.

The farm was a success and the publicity it garnered came just in time. That year, an infestation of the Mexican boll weevil swept across Texas, savaging cotton crops and threatening livelihoods as it went. The story of the Porter farm and its potential for wide-scale control convinced the previously wary Secretary of Agriculture to fund an emergency demonstration campaign. The purpose was to convince farmers to try newer methods by proving to them that even in the midst of a weevil attack, cotton could be grown successfully if Knapp’s methods were in use.⁴⁹ Knapp incorporated into his plan the “cultural methods” of

⁴⁸ Lord, 54.

⁴⁹ Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 8-9; Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 210-212; True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work, The Agrarian Revival*, 58-64.

control the USDA and its Bureau of Entomology had proposed. These strategies (what we now call Integrated Pest Management) were simple and effective. To retard the spread of the weevil, Knapp and his agents encouraged farmers to plant early an early-maturing variety of cotton, since the weevil itself did not mature into its most destructive form until late summer. Additionally, Knapp and the USDA urged farmers to weed and cultivate thoroughly to remove weevil habitats, burn all infected squares, and protect wildlife that preyed upon the weevil, such as quail.⁵⁰

The anti-weevil coup reassured Knapp that his ideas were viable and that demonstration could work on private farms. Furthermore, though his immediate task was boll weevil control, he saw farmers' vulnerability to the insect as a symptom of deep-rooted debilitation in the rural South. Knapp long had been interested in extending agrarian education beyond the farmer in the field, into the rural home. He saw ample room for improvement in the rural South as a whole, where dilapidated buildings cast shadows on "the same old mule . . . hitched to a plow Adam rejected as not up-to-date."⁵¹ The whole-farm approach would evolve into the marrow of Extension philosophy, so that the work reached out in ever-widening circles.

Defining those circles was sticky at times. In 1906, Booker T. Washington launched an idea formulated by his and George Washington Carver's experiences speaking with black farmers. Since so few farmers had access to a car to attend institutes or other meetings, Washington decided to bring the meetings to the farmers, via a moveable school. The Jesup Wagon, named for benefactor Morris K. Jesup, began moving through Macon County,

⁵⁰ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 212-215.

⁵¹ Seaman A. Knapp, "Farmers' Co-Operative Demonstration Work," *Southern Educational Review* 3 (October 1906), 50-51. See Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 216-221, regarding the early contests for control and authority between Knapp's agents and the scientific crowd in colleges and the USDA. Smith-Lever would diffuse much of this jealousy by basing agents at land-grant colleges.

Alabama, stopping in one community after another. Farmers, and their wives, gathered at the homes of the sponsoring neighbors and spent several days learning and socializing together. The Jesup Wagon carried tools, seed packets, churns, milk testers and a variety of other improvement-oriented equipment for demonstrating. The gatherings proved popular, and demonstrated the efficacy, once again, of taking agrarian education to the people, on their terms.

Washington saw an opportunity for expanding and enriching this sort of extension by combining forces with Knapp. He approached Knapp with the moveable school and suggested that black agents add their efforts to Knapp's cause, but he demurred. Aware of Southern racial customs, he feared that a black agent would be confined to work with black farmers, hampering his effectiveness and increasing costs; instead, Knapp intended his white agents to seek out black demonstrators.⁵² The General Education Board later convinced Knapp to reverse his decision and to employ black agents, the first being Thomas M. Campbell in Macon County, Alabama. On the eve of Smith-Lever, thirty-six black agents operated in nine Southern states.⁵³

Similar provisions were underway for youth and women. Knapp became directly involved in the boys' club movement, then the girls' tomato clubs. Like the Country Life Commission that succeeded him, Knapp identified a fit and content rural youth as the key to slowing the exodus from the countryside. Whatever his reservations about adults, Knapp was determined that African-American children be included in boys' and girls' clubs. Again,

⁵² "Demonstrators" were those farmers who agreed to host a single crop demonstration on their property. Initially, "demonstration farms" were those hosting the one crop, but the term later came to indicate any farm employing improved methods for improvement as a public model. "Cooperators" devoted most or all of their property to improvement under agent direction. True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 61.

⁵³ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 233; Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 114-115; Cotton, *The Lamplighters*, 12; True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work*, 63.

custom drew some lines between work with white and black children, but prolonged work with the children showed them to be just that, children, with little difference in their enthusiasm for corn, pigs, chickens and other prized projects.⁵⁴ Moreover, developing a good relationship with children proved crucial in establishing a viable home demonstration program. In five Southern states, the first home agents got their start with girls' tomato clubs, for which they were recognized for their effectiveness and appointed as state and county supervisors prior to 1914.⁵⁵ In time, working with farm girls gave agents access to farm wives, the most difficult group with whom to connect, and the foundation was in place for a formal structure to tie the demonstration bundle together.

The 1914 Smith-Lever Act creating the Cooperative Extension Service was a victory for agricultural reformers, demonstration pioneers and intellectual Progressives monitoring the state of the rural union. Indeed, Progressivism indelibly stamped home demonstration and extension work.⁵⁶ Progressivism became a key source of home demonstration's longevity by

⁵⁴ Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 239-245.

⁵⁵ The agents were Ella G. Agnew (Virginia), Susie Powell (Mississippi), Marie Cromer (South Carolina), Jane McKimmon (North Carolina) and Virginia P. Moore (Tennessee). Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, 248-49. Incidentally, McKimmon wrote an important early history of home demonstration in North Carolina, *When We're Green We Grow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945). And Moore became a leading home demonstration figure in Florida during the period of this dissertation, spearheading the state's Home Improvement campaign and working for years as the home demonstration home improvement specialist.

⁵⁶ I am not going to enter the progressivism terminology fray. Whether or not an "ism" is appropriate here is not really the issue. I am emphasizing the Progressive era as a period that provided an important context for extension and home demonstration, including much of its rhetoric, methodology and assumptions. That said, I believe that the relationship between home demonstration and Progressivism is not one-sided. Elisabeth Israels Perry has written a critique of Progressive historiography designed to point to women's marginalization within it. When women appear, she argues, it is usually in the context of social work or social justice – "municipal housekeeping," that is. And one of Perry's recommendations for a more meaningful historiography is to expand the periodization, to think of Progressivism by more flexible standards. Elisabeth Israels Perry, "Men are from the Gilded Age, Women are from the Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* January 2002 <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jga/1.1/perry.html> (18 August 2004), pars. 10-11, 23. With this critique in mind, I cannot help but suggest that an excellent way to expand our understanding of the Progressive era is to consider more fully the role of rural Americans. Obviously, the Country Life Movement figures in most discussions of Progressive reforms, but usually only briefly, and women

providing a contemporary impetus and framework for reforms, and helping to shape its programs and style. When we consider home demonstration, it is difficult not to see Progressivism's imprint—dynamic, sweeping and intensive. In fact, home demonstration and Progressivism share many hallmarks. First was an expectation of and support for professionalism; reformers were trained, systematically advanced and organized into affiliations. Second, both home demonstration and Progressivism incorporated multiple levels of government involvement. Though the government had maintained an interest in agricultural affairs and a proportion of the leadership had been particularly interested in rural life, the Progressives expertly blended government and agrarian pursuits via research, beginning with the Country Life Commission in 1908.⁵⁷ Third, these contemporary reformers exulted and relied upon science and academics as fundamental tools of meaningful change.⁵⁸

involved in rural reforms figure not at all. For example, Michael McGerr's 2003 analysis of Progressivism, which begins in 1870, only discusses rural America in four pages devoted to the Country Life Movement. Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York and London: Free Press, 2003), 104-107. Similarly, Anne Firor Scott's study of women's associations deals with Progressive era reformers, but "rural" does not even appear in the index. Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Steven J. Diner's Progressivism history deals with the Country Life Movement briefly, but his analysis is not particularly fresh; his criticism of the Commission and government-based agricultural reform reflects long-standing historiography. The most recent treatment of Country Life work is a 2004 article by Scott Peters and Paul Morgan, which examines the Commission in light of contemporary praise and historical criticism, concluding that the Movement was, indeed, progressive. Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, "The Country Life Commission. Reconsidering a Milestone in American History," *Agricultural History* 78 (2004): 289-316. The point is that more capacious treatments of Progressivism, reform and associations can add some meaningful and fresh insights, especially in periods where rural and urban America were equally in flux.

⁵⁷ Harold T. Pinkett, "Government Research Concerning Problems of American Rural Society," *Agricultural History* 58 (Summer 1984): 366. Obviously, the Country Life Commission was not the first large-scale government involvement in rural life; as I described earlier, the legislature had already passed a number of acts aimed at rural education and reform. However, the Country Life Commission was the first intensive, state and federally funded effort to *study* rural life as a whole – to identify its strengths and weaknesses and recommend improvements. Moreover, the long-term impact of the Commission's work was to inspire even more government intervention in agrarian America – like the Cooperative Extension Service.

⁵⁸ Robert Wiebe has an interesting take on this scientific validation. He argues that a new, organizational approach to reform created status anxiety among community leaders. The professional

Though Progressivism colored extension work with broad strokes, one Progressive initiative in particular, the Country Life Movement, lent important dimension to the ongoing pursuit of agrarian reform for women.⁵⁹ Progressives shared a general sense of foreboding about the modern world; they harbored a terrible dread that the grimy, slimy industrial gilt covering the nation would ruin its character, born in the country, completely. To make matters worse, country people seemed increasingly determined to flee their supposed bucolic repose in favor of the reported opportunity and variety of the cities. Those who stayed behind, reformers worried, would be the dregs of a rural society laid to waste. Food prices would skyrocket, American abundance would dwindle and urban problems, like poverty and labor unrest, would spiral out of control. How to retard and then reverse this process was the critical question. The answer lay in the country, with the people who lived and worked the rural life reformers wanted to save.

Though President Theodore Roosevelt is the figure we readily associate with the Country Life Movement, it, too, stemmed from a partly international initiative. Just like

reformer did not require the pedigree associated with old "status values," and so could usurp easily his social betters in terms of influence. The logical response was to establish new values -- professional values -- that rewarded measurable talent and ability. See Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968). This means of establishing order out of chaos is part of what Daniel Rodgers calls the rhetoric of social efficiency, one of the three "languages" which Progressives spoke (including social bonds and antimonopolism). See Rodgers' "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10 (1982): 113-132. There is a clear connection between social efficiency and home demonstration; much of the documentation agents submitted demonstrating their progress was in the form of standardized, statistical forms which translated improvement into hard numbers.

⁵⁹Despite the connection between Progressivism and reforms, many of which involved women, Elisabeth Perry has evaluated the relative absence of women from Progressive historiography. Early histories of Progressivism that did include women referred to all their work as "municipal housekeeping." The term carried a gendered connotation, for men's work in sanitation, welfare and other quality of life reforms were not referred to as any sort of housekeepers. Perry offers four suggestions as a starting point for expanding and enhancing this historiography: consider not just the history of woman's suffrage, but its consequences; rethink "moral reform" aspects of Progressivism, including women's prominence within it; broaden the scope of "politics" to embrace women's activism; "adopt a more capacious and flexible periodization" for the Progressive Era. See Perry, "Men are from the Gilded Age, Women are from the Progressive Era," pars. 10-11, 23.

earlier agrarian reforms had been, the Country Life Movement was transatlantic.⁶⁰ An intercontinental rural revival helped spark awareness in the United States; in the case of the Country Life Commission, Irishman Horace Plunkett served as an important ambassador for comprehensive rural improvement. In Ireland, Plunkett was galvanizing cooperative organizations among ailing farmers. His desire for agricultural efficiency took shape in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, itself inspired by a Danish example. Plunkett made cooperatives an integral part of a larger rehabilitation philosophy: “Better farming, better business, better living.” To expand the reach of efficiency-based reform, Plunkett used his seat in Parliament to push for an Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, through which he helped create a government program for agricultural extension.

Plunkett was popular at home and abroad; he had many friends in the United States, including Theodore Roosevelt. Eager to create a transatlantic reform network, and with ready access to the American president’s ear, Plunkett convinced him to create “a blue-ribbon commission on the ills and needs of rural life.”⁶¹ Originally, Plunkett and Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot tried to establish a bureau of rural life within the USDA, but when presented with the idea in 1907, Agricultural Secretary James Wilson demurred. As he understood it, his job was to oversee the farm, not the farm family. Disappointed but undeterred, Pinchot

⁶⁰ As Daniel Rodgers argues, the international example helped Southern agricultural reformers like Clarence Poe articulate a still nebulous agrarian reform urge. In fact, Rodgers points out, Poe saw agrarian reforms not in terms of democratization, but much as Arthur Young had in England – a way to rid the countryside of “loose ends and ragged edges.” For Poe, these were mainly African-Americans and other rural poor. Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 322-23.

⁶¹ Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 331-334. Indeed, the USDA’s Chief Forester, Gifford Pinchot, remarked to Plunkett, “Some of these days it will be known that you are the man who stirred up the whole movement in America.” D. Jerome Tweton, “Progressivism Discovers the Farm: The Country Life Commission of 1908,” *North Dakota Quarterly* (Summer 1971): 58. Indeed, the connection between American extension and global extension remained strong from the Early Modern period through the modern era. Once home extension was in place in the United States, it expanded to Puerto Rico and established far-flung friendships via the Associated Country Women of the World. Moreover, the model of American extension moved to developing nations in the twentieth-century, though the precise experience of extension workers and clients differed from place to place.

took his cue from Roosevelt's own methodology and suggested an investigatory commission to study rural life. Impressed by the "organization" model, and aware of the need to address rural ills in the home and community as well as the field, Roosevelt created the Commission on Country Life in 1908 and placed Liberty Hyde Bailey, Dean of Cornell's College of Agriculture, at the helm. Other distinguished figures rounded out the Commission: Kenyon Butterfield, the President of the Massachusetts College of Agriculture, Walter Hines Page, editor of *World's Work* and a Southern Progressive, Gifford Pinchot and Henry Wallace, editor of *Wallace's Farmer*.⁶² In order to gather data on the status of American country life, the Commission traveled rural America, surveying and taking testimonials from thousands of folks. It engineered a nationwide meet-at-the-schoolhouse forum on December 5, and it mailed over 500,000 circulars with twelve questions to households, as well as to newspapers to encouraging those without the circulars to write in with any concerns and suggestions they had.⁶³

The twelve circular inquiries were relatively broad, leaving ample room for respondents to specify concerns:

- I. Are the farm homes in your neighborhood as good as they should be under existing conditions?
- II. Are the schools in your neighborhood training boys and girls satisfactorily for life on the farm?
- III. Do the farmers in your neighborhood get the returns they reasonably should from the sale of their products?

⁶²Bailey was a wise choice for the Commission, for both his interest and experience. As early as 1896 he had expressed concern for the quality of rural life and, in 1906, conducted a Country Life Commission-style study of a New York county, investigating a variety of farm life factors, including the role of farm women and the education of children. See Tweton, 59. Tweton's article is a valuable discussion of how the Commission was established and how its internal dynamics played out. He relies heavily on correspondence between Commission members, revealing details left hidden by other histories. On the Commission composition, see Olaf F. Larson and Thomas B. Jones, "The Unpublished Data from Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life," *Agricultural History* 50 (1976): 583-84.

⁶³ Larson and Jones, "The Unpublished Data," 584; Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission," 163.

- IV. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the railroads, highroads, trolley lines, etc., the services they reasonably should have?
- V. Do the farmers in your neighborhood receive from the United States postal service, rural telephones, etc., the service they reasonably should expect?
- VI. Are the farmers and their wives in your neighborhood satisfactorily organized to promote their mutual buying and selling interest?
- VII. Are the renters of farms in your neighborhood making a satisfactory living?
- VIII. Is the supply of farm labor in your neighborhood satisfactory?
- IX. Are the conditions surrounding hired labor in your neighborhood satisfactory to the hired man?
- X. Have the farmers in your neighborhood satisfactory facilities for doing their business in banking, credit, insurance, etc.?
- XI. Are the sanitary conditions of farms in your neighborhood satisfactory?
- XII. Do the farmers and their wives and families in your neighborhood get together for mutual improvement, entertainment and social intercourse as much as they should?

“Why?” and “What suggestions have you to make?” followed each question. The circular concluded with a final inquiry: “What, in your judgment, is the most important single thing to be done for the general betterment of country life?” This question surely produced some fruitful responses, but they had not been tabulated when D.F. Houston, Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of Agriculture, had the circulars destroyed in 1915.⁶⁴ Even without the answers, it is clear that reform-minded people in positions to follow through on good intentions were interested in the quality of life in rural sectors.

⁶⁴ *Report of the Commission on Country Life, with an Introduction by Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Sturgis and Walton Company, 1911), 51-53. Larson and Jones explain briefly the internal politics that ultimately claimed the rich, raw data upon which the Commission based much of its report. Roosevelt allowed the Commission four months to complete its work and make its report. Feeling rushed, the Commission never had time to delve deeply into the circular responses. Indeed, Bailey complained that the wealth of information in the responses could never be fully analyzed, and so would have to yield only suggestive summaries. The report, brief and general, was published as Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress, 2d session for use by Congress in 1909 (Congress refused to fund a popular publication of the *Report*, but in 1911 the Spokane Chamber of Commerce and a private firm in New York City each published it for distribution in their respective regions. In 1944, the University of North Carolina Press published the *Report* for wide-scale popular consumption). Before any of the Commission could pen a fuller document, the circulars went to Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson, a man not friendly toward the Commission or its work, which had conducted itself independently of the USDA. Taft’s administration did not continue the Commission’s work, and Agricultural Secretary Houston, believing the circulars no longer valuable, ordered them destroyed. What remained intact were papers in commission members’ private possession, the report submitted to Congress and twelve brief, unpublished reports which summarize the findings from each of the twelve main circular inquiries. See Larson and Jones, 586; Ellsworth, “Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Movement,” 171.

Several of the circular inquiries are particularly notable in light of the home demonstration program to come, including that related to farm homes, rural services and sanitary conditions. Notably, the lead question addresses the whole farm home, a clear indication that reformers, all men in leadership positions, were cognizant at last of the necessity of total rural well-being. The Commission concluded its report with “The Young Farmer’s Practical Library,” a bibliography the Commission believed useful for invigorating and maintaining the countryside. Among the works was Virginia Terhune Van de Water’s *From Kitchen to Garret. Housekeeping and Home-Making*. The book’s description does not refer to rural homes as opposed to urban ones, but it describes a methodology for instruction and reform that home demonstration would mirror very closely:

From Kitchen to Garret does not deal with ideal or impractical decorations, but with the everyday care of each room in the ordinary home. It is written in simple language, as if the writer were face-to-face with her reader and explaining to her how to conduct her household and how to do so with the greatest comfort and least friction for all concerned. . . . As one accompanies the author on her tour of the house and listens to her advice . . . one finds the care of the home simplified and the duties of the house systematized into an harmonious whole.⁶⁵

Had this description been written in 1915, and been for the rural home, it might have been describing a HDA, and her language of “everyday good housekeeping,” “systematic housework,” “comfort and convenience.” This book offered advice as though the reader and writer were “face-to-face;” HDAs and rural women *were* face-to-face. Home demonstration’s lineage obviously was long, but its immediate forebears, domestic science and the Country Life Movement, clearly combined to instigate, propel and legitimize home demonstration as a reform measure by locating it at the juncture of two dynamic and immediate movements that both emphasized the fundamental good of the home in the greater good of the nation.

⁶⁵ *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, appendix.

Indeed, much of the motivation for the Country Life Commission was a growing sense that rural America was decaying from within. Michael McGerr argues that seeing rural America as less than idyllic was not easy as the century opened. Progressive-minded middle-class reformers were absorbed with urban blight, and they tended to look to the countryside as a moral and cultural cure. The realities, though, of farm tenancy and depopulation disrupted the illusion of an agrarian wonderland; caught up in the fever of the time, reformers took up the additional mission of saving the countryside. Scott Peters and Paul Morgan take a different tack, for they see the Country Life Movement as truly progressive; its work demonstrates “not an arrogant, technocratic agenda or a backward romanticism,” but “an emerging ecological sensitivity and a variant of Progressive Era reform devoted to key civic and economic ideals.” Of course, there is always the customary explanation, that the whole Country Life Movement was “a complex and ambiguous concern for individualism, social-mindedness, nostalgia for the past, morality, national integration based on science and efficiency, and distrust of materialism and special privilege.”⁶⁶

Whatever motivated Country Lifers, most importantly for our story, they evaluated the problem expansively. It was clear that overburdened, isolated women and restless children were as critical in the formula for rural rejuvenation as transportation costs and crop yields. In his 1960 evaluation of the Country Life Commission, Clayton Ellsworth articulated its long-term significance. The Commission and Roosevelt “realized that merely to increase the physical productivity of agriculture by the wonderful wand of science would not automatically solve the great problems of farm life.”⁶⁷ Several of the Commission’s specific findings speak

⁶⁶ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 104-105; Peters and Morgan, 292, 289; *Historical Dictionary of the Progressive Era, 1890-1920*, eds. John D. Buenker and Edward R. Kantowicz (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 96.

to this holistic approach and address just the sort of battles that HDAs would wage in the near future. These acknowledgments were not always welcome news to those affected, but they stand out among the Country Life Commission's successes, especially as they informed what extension would take on as significant reforms.

A key Commission alert related to rural health—respondents' evaluation of neighborhood health was resoundingly negative. Problems prevalent in urban settings, such as water pollution and inadequate sanitation, were also common in the country. One of the long-term victories for the Commission was that its exposure helped launch a network of health reformers, including the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission and home demonstration, that took seriously the devastating impact of diseases like typhoid and hookworm and acted to bring about meaningful improvement. Frederick Stiles, the distinguished physician responsible for hookworm education, worked with the Country Life Commission as medical attaché, then took his findings to John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board, upon which Rockefeller devoted \$1,000,000 to establishing the Sanitary Commission for the purpose of eradicating hookworm in the South.

The lingering problem was a pervasive ignorance about the disease. One Georgia newspaper scoffed at Stiles' reports, crowing "Where was this hookworm or lazy disease, when it took five Yankee soldiers to whip one Southerner?"⁶⁸ Education via newspapers and other media, newly formed county health boards and, critically, on-the-ground reformers like HDAs was the only effective means for bringing hookworm under control. Once the Commission faded away, Extension moved in to take up the mantle of rural rejuvenation, especially in health. From the outset, HDAs acknowledged and tackled obstacles to rural

⁶⁷ Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission," 172. Of course, the "wand of science," as I noted above, continued to be an important tool for reformers, because some of what was wrong, like sanitary deficiencies, required hard-fact change to make a difference.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission," 171.

well-being, making the most of the Commission's revelations. In this regard, the Country Life Movement provided home demonstration with more than inspiration; the Commission's work gave home demonstration a mandate, a legitimacy that went beyond pretty curtains and tomato plants.

The report the Commission laid on the President's desk borrowed from Horace Plunkett's rhetoric and concluded that "'better farming, better living, and better business'" were the foundation of rural rejuvenation, and that rural people themselves were the linchpin in the whole process. Improved farming, home beautification, school consolidation and church revitalization were the Commission's central reform themes.⁶⁹ Its report called for three interrelated measures to initiate comprehensive uplift: first, an "inventory" of all rural resources, including soils, plants, animals and people; second, "'some way [to] unite all institutions, all organizations, all individuals, having any great interest in country life, into one great campaign for rural progress;'" and third, "the thorough organization and nationalization of extension work through colleges of agriculture." Finally, the Commission recommended that within each state agricultural college there be a discrete and comprehensive extension department directed to deal with not only agriculture, but also "'sanitation, education, homemaking and all interests of country life.'" ⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In fact, questions dealing with the rural church were part of a separate report, omitted from the main circulars in deference to Wallace's wishes. Though he agreed that the rural church was in decline, Wallace demurred at the idea of a government investigation into the matter. Similarly volatile issues also did not make it into the Commission's official agenda, including those dealing with race relations and immigrant labor. Ellsworth, "Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission," 163.

⁷⁰ Lord, *The Agrarian Revival*, 53; David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1995), 167-173; Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 11-13; *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 127. The Commission noted that some extension work was going on via agricultural colleges, "although on a pitifully small scale as compared with the needs." Only a nation-wide, funded and systematic approach to extension could effectively accomplish what the Commission saw as the crux of rural revitalization, "the arousing of the people . . . in terms of their daily lives." *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, 126. Several historians have drawn direct connections from the Commission's recommendations to the establishment of the Cooperative Extension Service, including Scott Peters and Paul Morgan in the most recent

For centuries, women had been an assumed part of the agricultural dynamic; likely no serious agricultural reformer expected that a deficient home would not hinder in some way bounty in the field. Yet, few agrarian thinkers and innovators had devoted much, if any, attention to reforms for women, even fewer to reforms led by women. Finally, around the turn of the century, reformers concerned with rural rejuvenation considered women and the home to be integral to the process, and acted upon that understanding. The coalescence of home economics' knowledge, Seaman Knapp's methodology and the Country Life Commission's recommendations made the time right for the rural home, and feminized agrarian reform, to come into their own. Urged to action, Congress provided official provision for rural domestic reform and education under the Smith-Lever Act.

In 1912, the growing popularity of some plan for federally supported extension work prompted at least sixteen bills in Congress for that purpose. Of these, a bill authored by Representative Asbury Lever seemed most promising, and after some modifications, he and Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia introduced what passed as the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. The gist of the bill was that it set up the Cooperative Extension Service, a body for agricultural and home economics extension work carried out by agents, men working with farmers, women working with farm women, and both men and women leading children in 4-H work. The most localized work was at the county level, then up to districts, states and finally to the national level. Extension agents worked under the cooperative direction of state land-grant colleges

evaluation of the Country Life Movement—a 1958 call for a second Country Life Commission noted that the first Commission had been successful partly because it had “stimulated the formation of the Agricultural Extension Service; Peters and Morgan, 290. Even so, historians have not neglected to point out the weaknesses in the Commission's report. Peters and Morgan offer a tidy historiography of these criticisms, including arguments that the Commission represented the views of nostalgic outsiders operating on little more than Jeffersonian theories. More than one critique has focused upon the Commission and the Country Life Movement in general, as feeding the interests of an urban nation. Peters and Morgan try to refine the critiques a bit by delineating the difference between the Country Life Movement and the Commission on Country Life. See Peters and Morgan, “The Country Life Commission,” 294-301, 301-313.

and the USDA. The exact nature of the work was contingent on the will and need of the local people, for extension work was entirely voluntary. The primary purpose of extension was to disseminate to rural people information gleaned from agricultural bodies like the USDA, agricultural colleges and experiment stations—the “collecting and diffusing [of] information” George Washington had recommended in 1796.⁷¹ In the case of home demonstration, this information represented the combined work of agricultural colleges and home economics.⁷² The leading principle of extension education, prior to and under Smith-Lever, was “to help these rural families help themselves by applying science, whether physical or social, to the daily routines of farming, homemaking, and family and community living.” As Edmund Brunner and Hsin Pao Yang describe it, Extension is “out-of-school, roadside education. . . . It dares to put its teaching to the acid test of practical workability on the land and in kitchens, home and communities.”⁷³

⁷¹ Some evidence of Extension’s tensile fluid strength is its organizational development. Extension work before Smith-Lever was carried on jointly between three offices: the Office of Experiment Stations (USDA) from 1888-1915, the Office of Cooperative Demonstration Work and the Office of Farm Management (Bureau of Plant Industry) from 1904-1914 and 1906-1915, respectively. Smith-Lever, passed May 8, 1914, expanded the USDA’s cooperative role and precipitated the consolidation of all extension work in the States Relations Office (SRS), established in 1915 by the Agricultural Appropriations Act. SRS operated out of Offices of Extension Work, one for the South and one for the North and West, until these were combined in 1921 with the Exhibits of the Secretary’s Office and the Office of Motion Pictures, Division of Publications. These separate entities formed the Office of Cooperative Extension Work, SRS. In 1923, this office became the Extension Service. In 1954, the Extension Service became Federal Extension Service, then the Extension Service again in 1970. All this time, the Service continued to operate out of the SRS. From 1978 to 1981, the Office became the Extension Staff, Science and Education Administration. Finally, in 1981, the Agricultural Secretary established the Extension Service once again, this time as part of the USDA. The details for all this organizational office shifting is in Correspondence of Alfred True, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 333.1 and Publications of the Extension Service and Predecessors, NARA, RG 287.

⁷² Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 13; Williams, 23-31; True, *A History of the Agricultural Extension Service*, 100-114; Lord, *The Agrarian Revival*, 88-97; Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer*, Chapter 11. Brunner and Yang and Williams offer detailed summaries of the Act’s main provisions. The full-text of the Act is in True, Appendix, 195-197. Williams provides, too, an overview of post-1914 Extension development and legislation, including the Capper-Ketcham Act, 1928, which increased funding, especially for women and children’s extension work. Williams, 31-34.

⁷³ Brunner and Yang, *Rural America and the Extension Service*, 1.

In Florida, the first major political booster for Extension was Governor Sidney J. Catts. Though part of a demagogic cadre of Progressive politicians who, as Wayne Flynt puts it, were “characterized by their emotional appeals to irrational issues,” Catts espoused the very rational benefits of agricultural extension for the state. Part politics and part inspiration, Catts supported higher learning in Florida, expanding both Florida State College for Women and University of Florida. Specifically, Catts advocated an extension system for Florida, encouraged by both his friendship with UF’s director of Extension, P. H. Rolfs, and the popularity of the extension idea among Floridians. In 1919, the Florida legislature approved a state-wide extension system, and work began in earnest.⁷⁴ As later HDAs would discover, however, state-level support did not always smooth the edges from local politics.

By the time it fully blossomed in the twentieth century, home demonstration had collapsed traditional domestic advice and agricultural improvement into one fertile seedbed of agrarian domesticity. Home demonstration agents’ work not only helped democratize agrarian reforms, it feminized them, by putting substantial power for improvement in the hands of women agents and women clients. Expertise was no longer the purview solely of men or elite women. 1919 is a long way from Thomas Tusser, not to mention Dorcas – but only in years. The quest for the “better way” has been ongoing, and though women have not always been at the center of it, they have been swept along in its wake with their fathers and husbands. Yet, even as reform by and for women moved into the spotlight, albeit alongside their male counterparts, agents found that challenges were only just beginning. High ideals and lofty sentiments aside, agents had to be hired, paid, housed, transported, equipped, introduced, and accepted—no easy task when many farm communities were isolated or farm women were

⁷⁴ Wayne Flynt, *Cracker Messiah. Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 196-197.

distrustful of strangers toting books which were not the Bible or an encyclopedia.⁷⁵ Perhaps this was the greatest challenge of all, finding acceptance, gaining trust, earning respect. Over nearly a century of service, HDAs found that negotiation, compromise and solidarity were indispensable survival tools.

⁷⁵ Kate Hill recalls the experiences of Edna Trigg, an early Texas home demonstration agent, who encountered skepticism and mistrust in her first years of work. The problem was overcoming ingrained pereceptions among rural men and women. Hill writes, "Farm women of the day knew that they needed many things to improve their living conditions, but for a woman to ride around and teach them how to can or prepare food was a strange conception. . . . The biological process of producing a child was supposed by many to endow a woman simultaneously with the halo of motherhood together with the knowledge and skill to feed, teach and care for and rear the child to successful maturity." Husbands scoffed at "book learning" for their wives and women balked at an outsider's critique of family homemaking methods passed from mothers to daughters. Hill, *Home Demonstration Work in Texas*, 7.

CHAPTER 3

INSPIRATION TO INSTITUTION: NEGOTIATING THE PROFESSIONAL HOME DEMONSTRATION AGENT

Just a sampling of the Extension Worker's Creed reveals the ideals that powered the home demonstration machine: "I believe in the sacredness of the farmer's home; in the holiness of the country woman's love and the opportunity that home should assure to culture, grace and power." Inspirational? Certainly. But even such moving sentiments cannot tell us the whole of what it meant to be an extension worker. We are forcibly reminded that these women and men were more than mere reformers and educators by another sentiment, gleaned from agents' 1927 suggestions for Florida extension conferences. Farm agent J. Lee Smith concluded his recommendations with a potent P.S.: "Get cushioned seats for auditorium."¹ Inspirational? Not exactly. But Smith's plea serves to remind us that extension work was a job, well-grounded in the daily grind.

The Smith-Lever Act did not just make extension official, it allowed it to become formalized, even codified, into career work for thousands of men and women, both white and black. It is unlikely that more than a few agents ever lost sight of the idealism that inspired their jobs – the pay and benefits alone did not warrant going into extension work if it did not have another, more lofty, appeal. But educating farmers and their families in rural communities throughout the United States and its territories was a massive undertaking, one that required considerable institutionalization to keep extension operating effectively. More important for our purposes here, the formal creation of the home demonstration agent, and her

¹ Flavia Gleason [FG] to Members of Epsilon Sigma Phi, 29 March 1934 (SC-21-6); University of Florida Extension Agents Conference, 1927. Recommendations for Improvement (SC-91a-3).

male counterpart, meant that extension was evolving from mere inspiration into a formidable institution with long-term viability.² This chapter highlights home demonstration's durability in terms of HDAs' dynamic professional world. The most salient feature in the process of professionalization was negotiation; dealing with other agents, superiors, clients and local governments taught HDAs an important lesson in bargaining, a skill that served them well throughout their tenure in Florida, a skill that averted termination.

To a considerable degree, the rigors of day-to-day negotiation and professional development promoted longevity by forcing home demonstration to be flexible, energetic and committed. Without these qualities, HDAs never could have made demonstration viable in the short term, or secured support for long-term development. The realities of an HDA's position demanded the negotiation that promoted survival. An HDA was not simply the overbearing representative of a white, urban, middle-class bureaucracy intent on bending the rural woman to the government's will. Neither was an HDA a local spokeswoman for hamlet autonomy and traditional customs. It is true there was a nationally constructed plan for home demonstration work. However, home demonstration lived on the ground, not on high. Every HDA worked as an intermediary between national agendas and local needs.³

² The bulk of sources for this chapter is correspondence, because no other source reveals daily battles and victories in so uncensored a way. For example, a report might indicate that someone had been hired or fired, but the correspondence tells us why. Most importantly, letters and telegrams reveal personal opinions and private conversations that would not be a part of more formal public records.

³ Jeannie Wayne has analyzed black extension workers' position as intermediaries in the context of subaltern theory. Though Wayne is dealing exclusively with black farm and home agents, her point is applicable throughout the Service. She writes, "The negotiation between agents and local populations described by [county agent Otis] O'Neal in 1916 also continued and evolved throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Black agents occasionally tested the limits of their authority, pushing the perimeters as far as they could and then backing off when required to do so." Jeannie Wayne, "'I Have Been through Fire.' Black Agricultural Extension Agents and the Politics of Negotiation," in *African-American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003): 164-165. I argue that Wayne's analysis for black agents can be applied broadly to not only black HDAs, but to white HDAs, as well, who worked within a male-dominated profession. This chapter will explore the intermediary role among HDAs dealing with both local people and colleagues. I thank Melissa Walker for bringing Wayne's essay to my attention.

For better or worse, HDAs were governed not by decree, but by context. Every county, every community, ultimately held the power to accept or reject home demonstration. The State HDA in 1948, Mary Keown, reminded attendees at an Extension workshop, “Extension work is very human; it is more than an organization chart and paid personnel. Extension work consists of living relationships between the people who carry it on and the individuals who benefit by participation.”⁴ Local acceptance only created new reasons HDAs had to be sensitive to local context—conditions such as a county’s rural-urban orientation, economic strength, infrastructure quality, racial make-up, county commission personality, existing community organizations, school attendance and physical well-being all shaped what an HDA did and how she did it within her county. For example, whether an HDA worked in Hillsborough County, anchored by Tampa and active in home demonstration from the start, or Franklin County, an undeveloped coastal county that did not even have extension until the late 1950s, is no insignificant factor. Or, consider this; Florida has sixty-seven counties, so it seems particularly disappointing that only eight or ten counties had a black HDA at any time during this period. However, the vast majority of Florida’s African-American population lived in the Panhandle, so it is those counties that matter when considering the extent of black home demonstration in Florida.

Even within their own offices (those who had them), HDAs negotiated with colleagues and superiors for travel time, equipment and clout. Those working in counties that had both a county agent and an HDA for an extended time faced less intraoffice resistance than those who began work with a county agent not accustomed to sharing space, resources or authority. None of this struggle, however, should be dismissed as simply the workings of a new agency seeking stable ground. In fact, we should be alert to the reality of home

⁴ Mary Keown, “Leadership—Selection, Training and Use,” in *The Extension Specialist. Evaluation of the Job, Program Development, Materials and their Use, Teaching and Relationships*. Report of Workshop at University of Florida; Gainesville, Florida; March 22 - April 2, 1948.

demonstration as a profession. HDAs did their job in an official capacity, with the same expectations of expertise that Progressives had demanded of themselves. Though there was some resistance to HDAs as government workers preaching book-learning among rural families, many other women accepted agents precisely because they could prove they knew what they were doing, and do so with grace, respect and, of course, diplomacy.

Home demonstration was career work, with all the attendant committees, paperwork (*a lot* of paperwork), training, salary battles, resignations, transfers, appointments and promotions.⁵ Moreover, though most of the relationships formed around home demonstration were positive, there were periods of serious contention and misgiving, too. Sex, race, class and community biases each played a part in sometimes slowing the momentum of reform. The elaborate bureaucracy of extension work at times only heightened the need for constant negotiation within the Service and between agents and their communities. The more home demonstration pushed out into the countryside and nearby towns, the greater the opportunity for contestation and power struggles. O. B. Martin rightly observed “It requires a high order of diplomacy to get women to improve their own condition and environment by impressing upon them the importance and dignity of the situation in which they are to help somebody else.”⁶

⁵ A visual example of the career orientation in home demonstration work is a brochure designed to attract women to home demonstration *as* a career. The brochure does mention briefly benefits such as “help promote better individual, family and community living.” But the vast majority of statements reflect home demonstration as a job: “If you want a good salary in comparison with other careers for women, a job which will challenge your ability, an opportunity to use your own initiative and originality, continuous professional improvement, satisfaction in your own growth, then you will like being a Florida Home Demonstration Agent.” See such brochures in SC-158-8. More to the point, the job responsibilities for District Agents includes “Maintaining efficient county personnel who are interested in Agricultural Extension Service work as a career.” “Home Demonstration Work in Florida. Duties and Responsibilities of Personnel” (SC-158-6).

⁶ O. B. Martin, *The Demonstration Work: Dr. Seaman A. Knapp's Contribution to Civilization* (Boston: The Stratford County., 1921), 152.

Furthermore, the Extension Service itself evolved as home demonstration grew within it, as women at every level carved out arenas of increased responsibility and leadership. At times, they came into direct conflict with their male associates, but pushed on nevertheless, even if it meant leaving Florida. As home demonstration grew, rural reform for women grew with it, so that rural women had ever more say in the quality of their home and community lives. Where women's concerns had once been peripheral at best in the agrarian reform agenda, home demonstration made them a priority, even if male supervisors did not always agree. Even after the number of farm women declined in the wake of a rural exodus following World War II, HDAs shifted to accommodate the changing needs of agents and clients alike, reinventing home demonstration as a career choice for ambitious, concerned women and its programs as practical, uplifting advice for women in a new and busy world. Negotiating this transformation, however, was not a simple task.

As a federal, state and county program of considerable breadth, the Cooperative Extension Service eventually embodied a bureaucracy that would hardly surprise modern Americans. At its inception, though, the Service was merely a formal version of the agricultural extension and education mechanisms that had been evolving since the colonial period. Once it became national and official, Extension had to develop standardized evaluation techniques, secure local financial and social backing, and maintain state and national political support. District and State agents absorbed much of the responsibility for keeping Extension education operative and effective, supplementing their educational duties with political, social and financial wrangling. Even Seaman Knapp's loftiest sentiments about rural rejuvenation and the all-important farm home could neither supply agents with the clerical help they needed nor put new tires on an old car. Putting qualified demonstration

agents in the field on a regular basis, and keeping them there, created a bureaucracy of its own.

Basically, the Extension system was composed of a network of information and authority flowing between the United States Department of Agriculture, state colleges of agriculture, county school boards, boards of commissioners and others of local influence. The final link—the men, women and children who participated in the extension work that agents offered—was also the most important.⁷ Without them, there was little practical use for extension. The simplest way to grasp the structure of the Extension Service is to see it. The complex representation of Extension organization on page 109, as it appeared in 1966, demonstrates the degree to which Seaman Knapp's emergency idea evolved into a fully articulated organizational network. It is necessary to remember, too, that this arrangement was replicated in every state, every territory and within the USDA itself. Interaction between these levels is not insignificant. For example, in the 1960s, in-service training conferences for agents in the Southeast often included not only Florida, Georgia and Alabama, but Puerto Rico.⁸ Home demonstration was always equally local, regional and national. Within Florida, the extension apparatus maintained the national flow-chart structure, headed by a Director, who, during most of the period covered here, was Wilmon Newell. Both the Director and the Vice-Director, A.P. Spencer, maintained their offices in Gainesville at the land-grant University of Florida (UF). UF served as the official hub of extension activity, but it was then an all-male university, so home demonstration operated out of Tallahassee's Florida State

⁷ Lincoln David Kelsey, *Cooperative Extension Work* (Ithaca, New York: Comstock Publishing Associates, 1955), 54.

⁸ See, for example, *The Extension Specialist. Evaluation of the Job, Program Development, Materials and Their Use, Teaching and Relationships. For Specialists from S. Carolina, Georgia, Florida and Puerto Rico* (Gainesville: University of Florida, March-April 1948).

College for Women (FSCW). Also in Tallahassee was Florida Agricultural and Mechanical School (FAMU), the home base for Negro extension.

So it was that one system operated out of three schools, segregated by sex and race. The resulting headaches were not inconsequential, since everyday discussion was slowed by the necessity of mailing almost all communication (telephone and telegraph were considered too expensive for regular use), or by waiting until one party could drop in on the other. The inadequacy of such an arrangement was not lost on Extension leaders. In 1927, District HDA Lucy Belle Settle wanted to move her office from Tallahassee to Gainesville, closer to her work in South Florida. Though there was some concern that this would cause a disruption in communications between home demonstration staff, Director Newell acknowledged that Settle's plan made real sense. Writing to State HDA Flavia Gleason about Settle's request, he commented, "all of the Extension work, Home Demonstration included, is a part of the activities of the University of Florida, and, if we were following out a logical plan in regard to headquarters, the official headquarters of all the Extension workers would be at Gainesville."⁹ Newell believed that the separation of extension staff was a "temporary arrangement," but segregated policies proved persistent. In 1963, the home demonstration state staff moved from FSU to UF, and Floy Britt came from FAMU to FSU to head up Negro home demonstration. All three groups of staff did not share space at UF until the 1970s.¹⁰

The woman in charge of all home demonstration state-wide maintained her office at FSCW. The State HDA answered to both the Vice-Director, with whom professional contact was frequent, and to the Director, as situations warranted. Subordinate to the State HDA were three white District HDAs and one black "District" HDA, as well as state subject specialists.

⁹ Wilmon Newell [WN] to FG, 15 September 1927 (SC-21-5).

¹⁰ *Florida Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Handbook 2002-2003*. <http://www.feafes.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf-docs/FEAFCSHandbook.pdf> (15 September 2005).

The black agent, in fact, oversaw all Negro home demonstration work in the state, but her relationship to the State HDA was equivalent to her white counterparts. Each white district agent oversaw roughly one-third of the work in the state, serving as an intermediary between the state and county home demonstration agents. Each county HDA served under her District HDA, though each might as easily contact the State HDA for assistance, advice, complaint, or praise regarding her county.

Within the counties, a further delegation of duty took place. The HDA conducted the program, but she often was supported by local leaders, clubwomen from the community who demonstrated a clear grasp of program principles and skills and who could successfully teach others. These women were not only helpful for the HDA, but provided vital time and manpower during periods of crisis. Some local leaders also joined the Senior Home Demonstration Council for their counties, and served as county delegates at the annual state Council meeting. Comprised of members of county home demonstration clubs, the Council's responsibility was to be the voice of Florida home demonstration nationally, in Washington, D.C. or at national Council meetings. Within the state, the Council guided the course of home demonstration work for the coming year by formally recommending programs, activities and themes. Made up of both HDAs, serving as advisors or consultants, and local home demonstration women, serving as members and delegates, the Council represented a truly cooperative effort between home demonstration personnel and club members. These adult positions were replicated for girls, who manned a Junior Home Demonstration Council and served as 4-H club leaders. Maintaining this elaborate system was not cheap, however, and the Service had to be creative, patient, and persistent when it came to funding its operations. Everything from typewriters to travel to paychecks was a potential aggravation for an agency which was consistently cash poor.

At least in theory, extension funding sounds harmonious enough; Lincoln David Kelsey describes it as a cooperative endeavor reflecting the nature of the work itself. Indeed, extension coffers filled with the combined resources of federal, state, county and private funds, and each were necessary to keep the whole operation afloat.¹¹ Wayne Rasmussen provides a basic overview—the federal government provided a “base fund,” state financing to the agricultural college or other college responsible for coordinating extension work provided about one-third of the costs, and counties or other local governments, including private contributors like farmers’ organizations, made up the remaining third of funds.¹² But especially at the county level, funding was no certainty.

The amount of money allocated for extension increased considerably between 1914 and the 1960s, and the sources for funding increasingly balanced. In 1915, a total of \$3,597,000 supported extension services; by 1954, the total allotment had climbed to \$100,617,000 for the states, Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. By 1962, the combined allocation had reached \$159,227,000. In 1915 the federal government provided more than forty percent of the funds, the state twenty-nine percent, and the counties twenty-two percent; by the 1960s, the burden of finance had leveled out to thirty-seven percent federal, thirty-nine percent state and twenty-two percent county. Over time, the money shifted from a heavy

¹¹ Kelsey, *Cooperative Extension Work*, 57.

¹² Dorothy Schweider, *75 Years of Service. Cooperative Extension in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), ix. Under Smith-Lever, federal grants-in-aid were to be distributed based on four factors: 1. a flat amount to every state with a minimum extension apparatus, 2. a portion based on a state’s farm population, 3. a portion based on a state’s rural population, and 4. a separate fund for the Secretary of Agriculture to distribute according to “relative need.” Local funding was less straightforward. State legislatures released funding to the land-grant institution under the direction of the state director of extension. At the county level, either the county government or a county sponsoring board administered funds, though in some states the county appropriations moved to the state extension office for administration. Finally, private funds were an integral part of the extension budget, a tradition established with the General Education Board. Those interested in expanding educational programs, as well as industrialists, local businessmen, and farm advocacy organizations, gave to extension as a means of furthering education among the rural populace. Kelsey, *Cooperative Extension Work*, 59, 61-62.

investment in agricultural demonstration work toward building the 4-H program, farm and home development, marketing, rural area development and forestry.¹³ As extension diversified, its personnel requirements and public accessibility had to expand, as well.

One critical impetus for planning and securing funding was the original county budget. First, agents and local leaders devised a county Plan of Work, and constructed a budget to match. They submitted the budget to whatever county board governed extension, and once approved, the budgets and plans of each county traveled to the state offices, where state directors composed a statewide plan of work and accompanying budget based on the county plans. Once settled, the state plan and budget moved to the land-grant institution for approval, after which they came under state legislative review. Funds agreed upon there were set aside for the state's portion of the total extension financing. The state budget and plan then went on to the office of the Secretary of Agriculture, and approval released federal funds for that state's use. Once funding was in place, there were still more options for paying agents' salaries. In some states, agents' pay came entirely from federal and state funds, while other states required that the county sponsoring board contribute to salaries from county resources. Thus an agent's salary depended on who signed the check – federal and state salaries were set by the state extension director, and county-inclusive salaries varied, depending upon the discretion of the county sponsoring board.¹⁴

So crucial was county support that its absence could forestall home demonstration altogether. In fact, state HDA Agnes Ellen Harris in 1917 remarked, "Until a community can make sufficient appropriations to support an efficient agent, it is probably better not to

¹³ H.C. Sanders, ed., *The Cooperative Extension Service* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 46; Kelsey, 60; R. L. Reeder, *The People and the Profession. Pioneers and Veterans of the Extension Service Remember How They Did Their Jobs* (Epsilon Sigma Phi, 1979), 99-100.

¹⁴ Kelsey, *Cooperative Extension Work*, 63.

undertake home demonstration work in the county.”¹⁵ Appropriations varied widely, depending on the relative wealth of the county and its attitude toward home demonstration. Where county appropriations lagged, state money compensated, to a certain extent. This was especially true for black agents. For example, in 1927 the best paid black HDA was Olive Smith, in Duval County. The county provided \$68 per month for her, the state \$22 and the federal government \$25, so that she made \$115 each month. Other counties, like Leon, appropriated only \$20, so that the state paid \$85 to offset the lack.¹⁶

Salaries tended to increase every year, though they continued to reflect the inequities in the pay scale and the variables based on county appropriations. In 1927, the best paid white HDA was Pansy Norton in Dade County, who earned nearly \$5,000 per year, compared to Ethyl Holloway in Santa Rosa, who earned \$1,700 annually. Though black HDAs’ salaries were less than their white counterparts’, the difference was not always as stark as we might expect. For example, in 1927 Olive Smith in Duval still earned \$1,035 per year, though Alice Poole in Leon now earned more than \$1,100 annually. The next year, when Negro District Farm Agent A. A. Turner’s wife Susie was hired as an HDA, she began working for \$1,440 and later that year Julia Miller was hired for \$1,500 annually.¹⁷ For many agents, white and black, if salaries failed to compensate for the particular stresses of their jobs, they might begin to consider more attractive offers as they came up.

The most serious consequence of low salaries was the very real threat of losing good agents who left their positions for greener pastures. In most of these cases, state staff negotiated aggressively to prevent personnel loss. Sometimes an agent could be saved by a

¹⁵ *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1917* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 62.

¹⁶ Flavia Gleason, Recommendations for appointment of Negro Home Demonstration Workers, 1926 (SC-21-5).

¹⁷ FG to APS, 29 May 1928; WN to FG, 13 March 1928; 18 December 1928 (SC-21-5).

timely salary boost. Dairy and nutrition specialist Mary Stennis seriously considered leaving Florida for a better-paying position elsewhere, but Flavia Gleason alerted her that talks were underway to raise Stennis' salary by \$200—Gleason's pro-active stance kept Stennis in Florida after all.¹⁸ Stennis' value as a specialist made her a good candidate for financial intervention, but not all agents could be saved this way, especially where counties just would not support them any longer. In 1931, Okaloosa County HDA Bertha Henry alerted A. P. Spencer that the county was planning to terminate its appropriation for her because it could afford to support only one agent.¹⁹ As usual, Gleason and Spencer batted about potential solutions, but none looked promising. The county offered to pay Henry's salary with land, but Spencer rejected the idea because of its irregularity and the danger that any such land could be worthless. Henry asked Spencer about the advisability of sending to the board letters from her club women and girls, but he advised her against "anything that would indicate a political action on her part."²⁰

Henry's popularity was not in question; an article in the *Okaloosa News Journal* two years before, when talk first circulated of ending extension appropriations, applauded her work with rural homes. "Her value to the county," supporters argued, "... has been decidedly greater than her cost." Though the pro-Henry camp regarded severance as "a backward step," their opponents saw no choice but to terminate at least one agent in order to avoid raising taxes to pay her salary.²¹ In the end, the termination went through. Henry's appointment ended in 1932, and Okaloosa County did not have another HDA until 1955.

¹⁸ FG to WN, 8 December 1926 (SC-21-5).

¹⁹ FG to APS, 27 November 1931 (SC-21-6).

²⁰ APS to FG, 2 January 1932; 2 May 1932 (SC-21-6).

²¹ *Okaloosa News Journal*, 8 August 1930.

By no means were these salary woes isolated among women in Florida's Extension Service. HDAs simply did not receive pay on par with county farm agents, and the discrepancy was even more apparent among black home agents. The tenuous position between subordination and authority was only exacerbated by inadequate financial compensation. Expenditures for county agent work versus home demonstration work were unequal, though the gap narrowed over time. In 1933, for instance, Florida extension spent nearly \$125,000 on white county agents, \$78,000 on white home demonstration work, \$13,800 on black farm agent work, and \$13,400 on black HDAs. There obviously were discrepancies between agents based on both race and sex, but considering extension spending overall, almost \$47,000 more was devoted to agricultural work than to home work, and this does *not* take into account work among girls and boys, or that extension expenditures covered twice as many specific phases of work, such as Citriculture and Home Improvement, for men as for women, of either race or any age.²² Excluding Service-wide expenditures, like Farmers' Week or Publications, the difference in financial commitment between extension men and women in Florida in 1933 was about \$77,000.²³

Rooted in boll weevil eradication and crop diversification, the Extension Service remained an agriculture-driven agency. It recognized, and embraced, the need for revitalization in the rural home and community, but in the event of a financial tug-of-war, the weight of improved agriculture toppled the perceived lightweight needs of the family. Alert to this reality, State HDA Flavia Gleason worked hard to secure better salaries for her agents, especially those she believed excelled at their work, and she kept alert to equity between male

²² I do not mean by "men as for women" that these programs benefited only that group. All extension programs were of benefit to entire communities, but at the time there was a far more distinct division of labor and programs than would be true in later decades. So, a program like Citriculture was, for all intents and purposes, men's work.

²³ *Annual Report of Director of Extension, 1933* (SC-91a-1).

and female agents. For instance, when she recommended salary increases for several agents in 1929, she noted that it had been three years since the last salary increase for the women, though she “didn’t know how these salaries compare with those in Gainesville who have worked so faithfully in similar positions . . . for the past 12 and 10 years.”²⁴ Her attitude did not waver on the issue of race—a good agent was a good agent. Talented and devoted women ready to work with Florida’s black rural families were an asset not to be wasted. For instance, when black agents Diana Hartsfield’s and Nancy Henderson’s salaries were up for increases, Gleason wrote A. P. Spencer to encourage his approval. Nancy Henderson, in particular, “is doing a lot of work for the people of her county and she is carrying the expense of paying for the office which was built for her use.” Like many HDAs, especially black agents, Henderson paid for many of her own materials and transportation. And when Hartsfield’s salary looked in jeopardy from shortfalls in the Negro extension budget, Gleason advised Spencer that the white home demonstration budget could cover it.²⁵

The complicated process of securing and administering extension funds seems an inevitable byproduct of bureaucracy, but there was a more noble aim—accountability. Losing the support of the local people tolled the end of extension in that area, so it was critical that the system appeared credible and efficient, especially where taxpayers contributed to agents’ salaries and incurred expenses of their own while acting as local extension leaders. Both professional and volunteer extension workers were, as Kelsey puts it, “public servants [who] live in a goldfish bowl.” Their position depended upon the continued support and trust of the people, for “in a democracy, it is not long before the public communicates its impressions to

²⁴ FG to WN, 17 May 1929 (SC-21-5).

²⁵ FG to APS, 29 January 1925; 26 October 1925 (SC-21-5).

its legislative representatives. This is democracy in action . . . but it means accountability to the people in a very direct way which asserts itself every time a budget is submitted.”²⁶

Earning credibility also required hiring and placing skilled, personable agents. Good will and reformative fervor were useful tools while in the field, but once agents had exhausted their battery of inspirational verse, they had to prove they were offering something worthwhile, something tangible. As one Kentucky agent put it, “You didn’t dare go out without lead in your pencil.”²⁷ Administrative personnel in particular were well-educated. In the 1920s, official state reports did not even include the educational background of supervisors in its roster of extension staff. By 1958, nearly every member of the home demonstration supervisory staff held at least a Master’s degree, and some of the agricultural supervisors a doctorate, in their field.²⁸ Clearly, as extension settled into Florida and the demand for professionalism increased, the Service responded by publicly advertising its agents’ apparent expertise, moving the work closer to a career orientation.

County agents typically had a B.S. in Home Economics, though some simply had significant experience in rural reform and education.²⁹ So it was with Beulah Shute, a strong candidate to fill the Negro District Home Demonstration position in 1936. Flavia Gleason believed Shute showed great potential because “she is a woman of considerable ability, has excellent leadership qualities and excellent subject-matter training as well as good experiences

²⁶ Kelsey, *Cooperative Extension Work*, 64. Other extension personnel recognized the need for a job well-done. In a taped interview in 1975, some extension veterans commented upon the challenges of establishing demonstration work that the people could trust, then and later. Said one veteran, “We build on the good will of our predecessors through 50 years of Extension, and those who follow us can do the same thing if we don’t screw it up.” Reeder, *The People and the Profession*, 13.

²⁷ Reeder, *The People and the Profession*, 85.

²⁸ Compare *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1920 and 1958* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921; 1959).

²⁹ For an overall job description and responsibilities review, see “Roles and Responsibility of Personnel” (SC-158-6).

that will be well for us to inject into the negro home demonstration program.” Shute had taught home economics courses for six years prior to her application, giving her a practical advantage over some other candidates. Gleason was concerned, however, that Shute had never served as a county worker, the kind she would be supervising if hired. “However,” Gleason assured Director Newell, “she made me feel that she would be perfectly willing and anxious to do so at any time and had been eager to go into the extension field for quite a while. She has, too, had considerable contact with extension work in South Carolina . . . She impresses me as having a good understanding of the purpose of our work and the way it is carried on.”³⁰

Sometimes the most important rationale for placing an agent was that a county wanted one. Several counties lobbied actively for a HDA. Though not all were successful, the women who demanded home demonstration demonstrated their commitment to it and their willingness to speak up on behalf of their own wishes. Some county requests were more promising than others. In 1927, A. P. Spencer wrote to Flavia Gleason that he had a request from Hernando County officials for both a county agent and an HDA. Indeed, they were interested enough to begin collecting information on potential salaries and financial responsibilities.³¹ However, either because of misunderstanding or limited funds, many counties appropriated for only one agent. Bradford County commissioners, when they wanted the services of a county agent to assist with hog vaccinations, decided they would have to terminate their contract with Bradford’s HDA.³²

Seldom were women involved with home demonstration pleased by such decisions, and their dissent could be quite vigorous. During the Depression, especially, county boards

³⁰ FG to WN, 29 January 1936 (SC-21-7).

³¹ APS to FG, 18 June 1927 (SC-21-5).

³² FG to APS, 13 June 1933 (SC-21-6).

became more cautious to safeguard already limited resources. But Flavia Gleason remained determined to keep home demonstration afloat in as many locales as possible, even if one agent worked two counties. She believed firmly that the either-or policy many counties took toward agricultural and home demonstration agents was unnecessary and she encouraged the Director to remedy this common problem. "I believe it would be beneficial all the way around," she wrote him, "if it were understood in the counties that the Extension Service includes both county agricultural agents and home demonstration agents." Home demonstration, she intimated, was not some peripheral, throwaway program of garden clubs and sewing circles. As she explained to Spencer in 1932, "Our work has just gone through a very unpleasant experience in Palm Beach County where the commissioners retained . . . the county agricultural agent and a Smith-Hughes worker but did not include an appropriation for home demonstration women work until pressure was brought to bear from the women." Until then, the commissioners and the school board had each tried to force the other to take on the home demonstration appropriation, so that "home demonstration work is batted around from one to the other in a most unsatisfactory way and certainly not because of any failure on the part of the agents to render splendid service resulting in work evidently very much appreciated by the people."³³

Women stepped in to demand respect and funding for Palm Beach home demonstration, and they followed suit in Hillsborough and Liberty, though with varying degrees of force. In 1933, Hillsborough County's Wimauma Home Demonstration Club wrote to Wayne Thomas of the "Budget Board" expressing their support for home demonstration work in general and their particular approval of HDA Clarine Belcher. Their testimony was brief, but pointed: "We . . . deeply regret your action in cutting down the Home

³³ FG to APS, 27 July 1932 (SC-21-6).

Demonstration work in our county. . . Each member feels that much of the instruction and information given to us on Home Management, Home Improvement, etc. has been very practical and very helpful, and it is with genuine regret that we learn it is to be cut down.”³⁴

The following year, a similar situation arose in Liberty County, but the response was less polite—at least as the commissioners understood it. In October, A. P. Spencer wrote to State HDA Gleason that he had just met with Liberty’s agricultural agent, who delivered the news that the county had discontinued all extension work. Spencer believed the severance was “a result of a demand on the part of the women’s club that they [commissioners] also employ a home demonstration agent,” but without the funds to do so, the board decided “with all the controversy” it would be better to have no agents at all. The Vice-Director was rather dismayed, for it seemed that without some additional funding, or a change of heart from the women’s club, no extension work could go forward in Liberty.³⁵

As was often the case, the original information was not entirely accurate. District HDA Ruby McDavid visited Liberty and assured Gleason that no one there had demanded either a home agent or no agent, but that several men and women had indicated that, if only one agent could be supported, they preferred an HDA, to continue the work agent Josephine Nimmo had been doing. Indeed, as Gleason heard it, funding was not the issue. Rather, “several reliable sources” had told McDavid that the county apparently had imposed some rule that all agents, as county workers, had to relinquish part of their salaries to certain members of the Board, in return for it appropriating for extension work. Not surprisingly, neither Nimmo

³⁴ Mrs. H. R. Lightfoot and Mrs. D. M. Dowdell to Wayne Thomas, 9 October 1933 (SC-21-6).

³⁵ APS to FG, 5 October 1934 (SC-21-6).

nor McDavid were pleased with this idea and refused to cooperate. Gleason surmised, "It may be that this has something to do with no appropriation being made."³⁶

Though disappointed that Liberty County looked to lose any benefits of extension, Gleason simply shifted gears and moved ahead. Liberty had been worked along with Calhoun County, so that each county was only required to make a small appropriation. Calhoun readily agreed, so when Liberty balked Calhoun received the full measure of extension staff and support for its benefit. In fact, Calhoun was so interested in keeping the work that its board approached McDavid about securing financial arrangements so that even if Liberty decided to appropriate after all, Calhoun could maintain its agents full time, rather than sharing them again.³⁷ The Liberty situation illustrates the sort of power dynamics inherent in extension work. Local women's collective voice could coax home demonstration work from a reluctant board, or it might cause such stir as to eliminate extension work entirely. And, though home demonstration could not easily operate in a county which refused to appropriate for it, home extension staff were not crippled by a certain board's disinterest. Someone else surely wanted the work and agents were easily transferred to more welcoming counties.

These problems were frustrating, but not usually serious. There were, however, some troubles of considerable significance in the professional life of HDAs, troubles that required every negotiating skill to navigate and resolve with minimal damage. Most internal tension was played out in terse letters, rather than open hostility. But that was not so for A. A. Turner and at least two Negro District home agents. The root of the discord appeared to be about power and control, a battle for authority.

Until 1925, Turner had directly supervised all black extension workers in Florida, home and agricultural alike. As Negro extension work expanded, it became clear that a

³⁶ FG to APS, 11 October 1934 (SC-21-6).

³⁷ FG to APS, 2 November 1934 (SC-21-6).

female district agent, akin to the white district agents, would be an asset to the work. At the same time, Turner's wife Susie accompanied him on some trips out into the country. She talked with the women she met, informally demonstrated some ideas to them and discussed club formation. Susie came back enthusiastic and ready to do more. Flavia Gleason was all for it, encouraged by Susie's ideas and sense of commitment.³⁸ Spencer likewise approved, at least for the time being, and in March advised Gleason to give Susie some concrete instruction in what to discuss with the women.³⁹ Though he did not specifically recommend officially appointing Susie, just a few days Gleason later made a suggestion for Susie's monthly salary, and Spencer agreed to a six-week appointment, soon extended by another few weeks.⁴⁰ Over the next two years, Susie worked through incremental appointments as the budget allowed, establishing herself as a leader for Negro home demonstration work.⁴¹ When the state staff began looking seriously for a more permanent replacement, Turner recommended that Susie stay on so as not to disrupt the work. Spencer insisted, however, that Turner try to find someone with more official qualifications, and he grudgingly agreed. The search began within the state, but no one seemed fully ready for the job.⁴² In the summer of 1928, Turner enlisted the aid of T. M. Campbell, a field agent at Tuskegee, and he came up with Julia Miller, a HDA in Arkansas.⁴³

Trouble began almost immediately. Turner was uncertain how to share responsibility with Miller; her formal position and attendant authority were very different from his relaxed

³⁸ FG to APS, 3 March 1925 (SC-21-5).

³⁹ APS to FG, 5 March 1926 (SC-21-5).

⁴⁰ FG to APS, 8 March 1926; APS to FG, 12 March 1926; 13 April 1926 (SC-21-5).

⁴¹ FG to WN, 16 January 1928 (SC-21-5).

⁴² A.A. Turner [AAT] to FG, 16 July 1928; APS to FG, 19 July 1928 (SC-21-5).

⁴³ AAT to T. M. Campbell, 18 October 1928; FG to WN, 24 November 1928 (SC-21-5).

relationship with his own wife. The territorial dispute did not abate with time, but grew more intense. In boxes of correspondence, no other situation demonstrates the power struggles within extension so well as that between Julia Miller and A. A. Turner. Miller's position was an awkward one, holding a relatively new post, struggling to define its boundaries and establish herself as a supervisor apart from, and equal to, Turner. Spencer commented to Flavia Gleason that Turner had a habit of critiquing every small thing which Miller did that irritated him, as though she were his subordinate.⁴⁴

Miller believed that she was not receiving the respect or the responsibility that came with her job. She wrote a personal letter to A. P. Spencer in June 1929 expressing her commitment to her work, but her dissatisfaction with the way she had to carry it out. She assured Spencer that she welcomed the direction and assistance of the State HDA, but "it would be very hard for me to work under a man's supervision, who had no experience and no training in my particular line of work. I don't feel I could get the sympathy, support and encouragement that I could get otherwise." Echoing Flavia Gleason's plea that every county should know home demonstration was a part of the Service, Miller stressed that everyone should know about her appointment and that when it came to Negro home demonstration work, she was in charge. "I have been patient and considerate," she wrote, "realizing that I am new and that others have spent long years of service, I have given over and compromised in many things." But, and she was as clear as possible, "I have refused to allow the District Agent to control my work and personal affairs."⁴⁵

In discussions with Gleason over the next few months, Spencer advised her that he had promised Miller the state staff would back her up and work to resolve the problems with Turner so that work could progress. Work did go on, though by February of the next year,

⁴⁴ APS to FG, 8 April 1929 (SC-21-5).

⁴⁵ Julia Miller [JM] to APS, 22 June 1929 (SC-21-5).

Miller was again complaining to Spencer that Susie Turner was “having a little too much to do with things right on,” and that too many of the home demonstration women were devoting their time to farm exhibits rather than home demonstration exhibits.⁴⁶ Gleason remained steadfastly behind Miller throughout her tenure, affirming her qualifications and excellent record of service in Florida to the Director. Miller had her faults, but she was a skilled and devoted leader, and Gleason felt “very much better about the type of work which the negro women are doing than I have ever felt and I know this is due to Julia’s work with them.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the situation only grew tenser. Her frustration mounting, Miller received a welcome offer of relief in June 1931.

The same day that Gleason wrote to Newell assuring him that Julia Miller was the best person to fulfill the District HDA position, Miller received additional confirmation of her skills from another source—a job offer from the Oklahoma Extension Service, for exactly the position she held in Florida. The Oklahoma position promised a better salary and, by the tone of the offer letters, considerably more freedom to do her job.⁴⁸ Perhaps comforted that an alternative was available, Miller delayed any decision until the legislature made salary announcements, for she did not want to leave Florida without achieving goals she had set. The competition was fierce, though. For every doubt Miller raised to Oklahoma, its extension director had a reassuring answer and the Service there remained persistent in pursuing her.⁴⁹ The odds for Florida did not look good, but Gleason was determined not to lose Miller without exhausting every resource to keep her on. As she told Spencer that fall, “It is not an increase

⁴⁶ APS to JM, 24 June 1929; APS to FG, 1 July 1929 (SC-21-5); APS to FG, 19 February 1930 (SC-21-6).

⁴⁷ FG to WN, 22 April 1930 (SC-21-6).

⁴⁸ Norma Brumbaugh to JM, 22 June 1931 (SC-21-6).

⁴⁹ JM to APS, 18 July 1931; D. P. Trent to JM, 1 August 1931 (SC-21-6).

[in salary] for Julia that I am so concerned about but the expensive loss it seems to me that it would be to Florida to let Julia go.”⁵⁰ For a brief time, it looked that Gleason’s own persistence paid off. Miller wired Oklahoma that she was officially declining their offer. But some time over the next month, something changed, and Miller resigned her position to accept its counterpart in Oklahoma. Spencer believed that Oklahoma must have made a last-ditch attempt to secure her and won her at last, but her devotion to Florida extension suggests that only the combination of financial and emotional strain induced her to leave.⁵¹

The search for her replacement began in earnest, but this time the state staff was mindful of prior problems and tried to avoid the sort of power struggle which had crippled Miller’s work and driven her away. The Director was anxious that Miller be replaced as soon as possible to avoid the Board eliminating the Negro District Agent position entirely or turning that supervision over to a white agent.⁵² But finding a suitable candidate was difficult. In December, Rosa Ballard assumed the post as District Agent. Gleason was especially pleased that, because of her long experience, Ballard “may be more aggressive than Julia.”⁵³ Here was a woman Gleason believed could hold her own against Turner. Sadly, tragedy struck just as Ballard was establishing herself. In the summer of 1933, she drowned while swimming in a lake near Tallahassee.⁵⁴ Soon after, the hunt was on once again to fill the Negro District Agent position. After a delay of nearly three years, Beulah Shute took the helm, her experience outweighing the appeal of Floy Britt, the woman Gleason believed was

⁵⁰ FG to APS, 16 September 1931 (SC-21-6).

⁵¹ APS to FG, 16 October 1931 (SC-21-6).

⁵² WN to FG, 30 November 1931 (SC-21-6).

⁵³ FG to APS, 15 December 1931 (SC-21-6). For correspondence leading up to Ballard’s appointment, including recommendations for other candidates, see SC-21-6 for 1931.

⁵⁴ FG to WN, 26 June 1933 (SC-21-6).

“the best qualified negro home demonstration agent in Florida.” But Gleason feared that an ill feeling between Britt and Turner would handicap her, and that she would not be so readily accepted as a supervisor as Shute.⁵⁵ Ultimately, Floy Britt did become the District Agent, a post she served with great success and longevity; assuming the position in 1943, Britt was still there in 1960, with no plans to leave in sight.⁵⁶

The strain upon the Negro District Agent, especially in relation to A. A. Turner as her agricultural counterpart, is evidence of the strain put upon the entire Service by its segregated policies, causing logistical and personal confusion. Assuming that Florida’s extension work had been integrated from the start, the Negro District Agent role might never have been created because the work for that position would have been covered by a regular district agent. Alternatively, had the segregated Service created Turner’s counterpart when it created his position, much of the unpleasant mess that followed Julia Miller’s appointment might have been averted. Turner never would have been in charge of women’s home demonstration work, so he always would have shared an office and he would have been accustomed to working on extension projects jointly. For the good of black rural Floridians, it was an undisputed boon that Susie Turner was interested in working among them and proposing the creation of a supervisory position akin to a white district or state agent. But for the professional women who manned the position, the frustration of having their responsibility and authority thwarted by internal boundary disputes was both disheartening and counterproductive.

Like so many other battles in the service of extension, this one was won by persistence and experience in a joint effort among HDAs to see home demonstration for black

⁵⁵ FG to APS, 29 January 1936 (SC-21-7).

⁵⁶ As in this case, the easiest way to track service in Florida’s Cooperative Extension Service is to use the personnel roster in each annual *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities*. Floy Britt first appears as Negro District Agent in 1943.

women succeed and flourish. When naming allies, home demonstration workers of both races sided with one another against their male counterparts. This was not necessarily a feminist-style protest for equal pay, but these were career women with training and experience who shared a common concern for the state of the rural home. They believed their work was vital and they responded to challenges accordingly. Even so, HDAs could not expend all their energies negotiating professional borders within extension, for some battles had to be won within the wider home demonstration community. In such cases, HDAs at every level were called upon to be what O. B. Martin called “an ambassador extraordinary.”⁵⁷

In some cases, a dispute might flare up between an agent and her county. One such “unwholesome situation” was in Volusia County with HDA Orpha Cole. In May 1932, A. P. Spencer wrote to Flavia Gleason that he had heard rumors that Volusia County was terminating its home demonstration appropriation.⁵⁸ In the cash-poor Thirties, this was not surprising, but over the next few months more details emerged that revealed an uglier situation. By July Gleason was recommending to Director Newell that Cole’s service in Volusia be discontinued. Gleason cited a steady stream of “petitions and counter-petitions to remove [Cole] from office,” creating “what I consider undesirable publicity especially at this time.” Despite Gleason’s and district agent Mary Keown’s efforts to smooth the waters, the situation had only grown worse. Cole’s own “unsound” attitude toward the women in her county and her superiors seemed at the heart of the conflict. One of the simplest, but most fundamental requirements for home demonstration work, the ability to “work with people,” seemed beyond Cole’s reach.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Martin, *The Demonstration Work*, 152.

⁵⁸ APS to FG, 27 May 1932 (SC-21-6).

⁵⁹ APS to FG, 27 May 1932 (SC-21-6).

Gleason composed two letters then, the first to Orpha Cole advising her to either resign or take an indefinite leave of absence. Gleason did not mince words in her rebuke. Since home demonstration work had become the “source of a wrangle in the county,” and “harmony, good will and confidence are essential factors in all home demonstration work,” Cole’s performance in Volusia and her professional attitude toward the state office had been “unsatisfactory to us for some time.” For whatever reason, Cole seemed “unable to make the adjustments which I had hoped you would do following my several conferences with you.”⁶⁰ In a subsequent letter to the Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners Ben Thursby, Gleason focused on damage control. She carefully expressed regret for her decision regarding HDA Cole, acknowledging her long service in Volusia, but remained firm in her conviction that this was the best course to preserve the long-time and “pleasant” relationship between the Extension Service and the county.⁶¹ Regardless of the immediate fallout of the “Volusia situation,” Gleason was most concerned with the long-term impact of ill will in the county toward home demonstration.

Whatever, or whoever, had caused the trouble, Gleason believed that removing Cole from the county was the surest way to maintain the confidence of the people. Or maybe not. Soon after she notified the Board of her decision regarding HDA Cole, Gleason received a visit from a committee of Volusia women, Orpha Cole in tow, requesting that home demonstration not be terminated and that Miss Cole be kept as home demonstration agent. Though the Board had already sent Gleason a copy of the resolution abolishing home demonstration work in Volusia, she assured the committee that she would discuss the matter with the commissioners, with her first priority to encourage them to make another appropriation for home demonstration work in general. Only after that had been secured

⁶⁰ FG to Orpha Cole, 30 June 1932 (SC-21-6).

⁶¹ FG to Ben Thursby, 2 July 1932 (SC-21-6).

would she approach the possibility of Orpha Cole staying on as HDA, and that matter was the Board's choice.⁶²

As the summer wore on, the "wrangle" grew more tangled, to the point that some of the commissioners favored re-instating home demonstration, but only with Miss Cole as agent, and Gleason back-pedaled to assure them that if that was their desire she certainly would work to ensure such an arrangement was successful. But ultimately, the Board did not appropriate, and home demonstration work ceased in Volusia for two years. Finally in 1934, "some of the leading women in Volusia County" met with the commissioners to discuss re-installing home demonstration. Once Gleason had forwarded her recommendation for a new agent, Marguerite Norton, to Director Newell, the Service was encouraged that the Volusia Board was again willing to "cooperate actively in the home demonstration work," and hopes were high that "the work will proceed under more agreeable circumstances and in a better atmosphere than was the case some months back."⁶³

Other disputes within counties arose from circumstances based on the Extension Service's segregated policies. The resulting confusion not only hampered work, but created discord within counties where work otherwise was welcome. Because so many counties were cash poor, and were less likely to subsidize the salary for a black agent, black HDAs usually received pay almost entirely from state and federal funds. On the one hand, this shortchanged an agent in terms of her salary. On the other hand, it facilitated putting home demonstration into counties where it could reach black residents whom commissioners were not willing to support in this way. Such was the case in 1933 Suwannee County, where the Service had installed a black HDA, Miss Mackenzie, for what the county regarded as "free." However,

⁶² FG to Ben Thursby, 8 August 1932 (SC-21-6).

⁶³ FG to WN, 19 September 1932 (SC-21-6); FG to Ben Thursby, 23 September 1932 (SC-21-6); FG to WN, 18 July 1934 (SC-21-6).

maintaining a white home agent in a county demanded that its board help support her work because, as Gleason explained, “no white home demonstration agent, of course, could work for only the amount which state and federal funds provide for our county workers.” Suwannee County commissioners, however, did not understand why they could not have a white agent for “free,” as well, if that was the case for Mackenzie.⁶⁴

The resulting confusion created an uncomfortable situation for Mackenzie, the county agent N. G. Thomas, and Negro District Agent A. A. Turner. Moreover, it threatened the ongoing presence of Mackenzie or any other black HDA in Suwannee. Unfortunately, the county made this a reality, deciding that if it could not have a white HDA as well as a black agent, even if a black HDA worked at no cost to the county, it was better to discontinue her work entirely.⁶⁵ Of this decision, Vice-Director Spencer remarked, “it seems like an unusual viewpoint they have.”⁶⁶

A.A. Turner took the opportunity of Mackenzie’s transfer to make his own recommendation for her new post in Alachua County. Hoping that “this will die out in Suwannee and not spread to other counties,” he emphasized the real value of supporting home demonstration in other counties. In particular, “the Suwannee county affair” bolstered his argument for continuing home demonstration work in St. Johns County; “the fact that the county commissioners there will contribute to the Negro work will be good assurance that no racial handicaps will likely occur.”⁶⁷ In a segregated agency in 1933, it is not especially surprising that “racial handicaps” existed, but Turner’s choice of words was spot on – racial assumptions and the resulting complications indeed could handicap otherwise valuable work.

⁶⁴ FG to N. G. Thomas, 5 October 1933 (SC-21-6).

⁶⁵ FG to APS, 11 October 1933 (SC-21-6).

⁶⁶ APS to FG, 13 October 1933 (SC-21-6).

⁶⁷ AAT to FG, 2 November 1933 (SC-21-6).

Finally, there were rare, but bitter, contests between women's groups. Normally, women from the various clubs around Florida got along swimmingly. So it was rather unexpected when some perceived grievance launched an exchange of rather sniffy letters between Mrs. Von Hofen of the Englewood Women's Club and several extension staff during most of 1932. State staff concluded the affair with the assertion that Mrs. Von Hofen was a snooty troublemaker, but the incident does demonstrate the sort of power certain people wielded in shaping a community home demonstration program. According to Von Hofen, Duval HDA Pearl Lafitte had informed the Englewood Women's Club, presumably part of the Federation of Women's Clubs, that no member could belong to both that group and a home demonstration club. Von Hofen promptly resigned her post as secretary of the Duval County Council of Home Demonstration Clubs and began a one-way correspondence with various extension staff, including State HDA Flavia Gleason and Vice-Director A. P. Spencer.⁶⁸ She came armed with two main, if peculiar, charges: Pearl Lafitte had caused dissension in the Englewood community and had misrepresented certain preferences for canning jar styles and brands. In a letter to Gleason, Von Hofen accused Lafitte of denying her stated preference for Kerr jars, which Von Hofen felt was "rather peculiar, don't you think? especially when, I dare say, the majority of us would not know the kerr jar if we saw one." That grievance aired, she launched into her next, that Lafitte had divided the Englewood women over club allegiance. She demanded that Gleason conduct an investigation into the matter, then waited for the expected apologies.⁶⁹ None came, so she took her case to a higher power.

In an angry letter to P. K. Yonge, the Chairman of the State Board of Control, Von Hofen repeated her charges against Lafitte, whom Von Hofen considered in violation of her duties as public servant. I have included the text of the letter on page 110 because, aside from

⁶⁸ Mrs. Louis Von Hofen [VH] to Grace Pillsbury, 16 February 1932 (SC-21-6).

⁶⁹ VH to FG, 20 February 1932 (SC-21-6).

its drama, it represents the sort of contention that, had Von Hofen been successful, would have fired Lafitte and possibly kept home demonstration out of the county for some time, as happened in Volusia. Fortunately, Lafitte was able to stem the tide of dissent satisfactorily by exposing an obvious misunderstanding. The gist was that only an established home demonstration club could become a member of the county home demonstration council—the rules had nothing whatsoever to do with the Federation of Women’s Clubs. Indeed, as Lafitte explained, the Englewood Women’s Club was only the name adopted for that community’s home demonstration club.⁷⁰

District agent Mary Keown assured Gleason that the dissent Von Hofen reported to be widespread was confined to a few women, and by September, the matter had wound down. Still, Gleason was disturbed. She wrote to the Vice-Director that though she had originally commended Mrs. Von Hofen for her interest and active role in home demonstration, “I am convinced now that the motive . . . [is] to go as far as she can with an ugly threat. I sincerely believe her unwholesome attitude to be the most troublesome factor in the community.”⁷¹ The ugly threat created an ugly situation, and though it seems amusing now, it serves as a reminder that HDAs may have striven to be inspiring and altruistic, but their welcome was not universal and could not be taken for granted. Indeed, Orpha Cole had alienated her county to a degree that it eschewed home demonstration altogether. The power of an influential malcontent was hardly insignificant, and home demonstration staff had to navigate disputes very carefully.

Despite the challenges, home demonstration offered some notable opportunities for professional development and fellowship. These professional venues represented a chance to

⁷⁰ Pearl Lafitte to FG, 19 May 1932 (SC-21-6).

⁷¹ FG to APS, 14 September 1932 (SC-21-6).

minge with a wider world while promoting or enhancing extension work. To begin, all agents could belong to Epsilon Sigma Phi, a professional fraternity chartered in 1922 to unite active and veteran Extension workers.⁷² Agents also took on a variety of professional tasks beyond what they carried out in demonstrations. This was particularly true of state and district agents and specialists. The sort of peripheral duties associated with home demonstration work reinforce the dynamism of the organization in several ways. Not only did conferences, publications, academic study and international exposure maintain a circle of contacts and influence over the years, but they each represented forays into a world where home demonstration went beyond a reform initiative to become a career for agents. True to their progressive roots, agents were sought out as experts to speak and write on home extension topics—outsiders considered agents professionals with all the attendant training, education and responsibilities.

Of course, not everyone who came calling was greeted with equal warmth. A variety of agencies contacted the Extension Service over the years seeking home demonstration information for or participation in studies related to reform. Whether or not agents participated depended on the work load required and the nature of the request. Political favors, though perhaps beneficial down the road, generally were denied. Claude Pepper, while running for the United States Senate, contacted Flavia Gleason in 1936 for permission to campaign among Florida's 4-H girls and their parents. She respectfully turned him down, citing the Service's inability to supply lists of the children to non-Extension petitioners, though he was welcome to stop by her office and look at the list himself. The assumption among the state staff was that the extra trouble of getting the 4-H list himself would deter

⁷² Epsilon Sigma Phi was created in 1927 as a national honorary fraternity of Extension personnel. As its history indicates, "The history of Cooperative Extension is inseparably intertwined with the lives and professional careers of Extension workers." Reeder, *The People and the Profession*, v, 103.

Pepper from pursuing those children and their families as part of his campaign.⁷³ On the other hand, when the Child Welfare Committee of the Florida Legion contacted Gleason seeking information on child welfare in Florida and home demonstration's role in securing children's well-being, she readily agreed. Perhaps it was Chairman A. Rice King's own skill at gaining allies that swayed her. "We are impressed with the value of home demonstration work as a social agency," he wrote to Gleason, "and are particularly anxious to receive your report." Gleason told Director Newell what she had decided, citing not only the immediate benefit to child welfare work, but the favorable publicity her participation would generate for home demonstration.⁷⁴

Some professional duties garnered good publicity for both home demonstration and the agent involved. Indeed, some of what HDAs took on actually helped mold home demonstration as it evolved over the years, keeping the female reformer and client at the forefront of change. Annual reports seem an unlikely source of such lobbying, but they were an important venue for solidifying home demonstration influence and its place in the Extension Service. Over the years, either the Vice-Director or the State HDA issued guidelines to agents for completing reports correctly, but Gleason made a particular appeal to HDAs for accurate reporting. Though "not as delightful an undertaking as some things we do, yet it is our means and privilege of presenting a description of the year's work that will aid particularly in a more permanent establishment of home demonstration work."⁷⁵

The home demonstration staff engaged in a number of projects to maintain control over their future. For example, HDAs contributed ideas toward reforming the format and purpose of their annual reports, demonstrating both the professional and reform benefits of

⁷³ Claude Pepper to FG, 31 June 1936, WN to FG, 14 July 1936 (SC-21-7).

⁷⁴ FG to WN, 31 January 1933 (SC-21-6).

⁷⁵ FG to all home demonstration agents, 29 October 1929 (SC-21-5).

active participation in home demonstration planning, refining its direction and efficacy. In 1936, the American Home Economics Research Committee embarked on a project to steer home economics on a course of greater utility to educators and reformers who relied on its science. Jane McKimmon, the North Carolina State HDA, wrote Flavia Gleason and other Southern state staff for recommendations concerning new home economics research. In response, Gleason enlisted the aid of each district agent and a number of HDAs, who submitted a long list of areas they would like to have researched and organized for use in home demonstration. One of the studies they suggested dealt with the content and format of annual reports, specifically ways to make them more useful. Agents also recommended that county profiles be developed to a degree that agents had a clearer idea of precisely what resources county families had available so that HDAs could tailor their programs as closely as possible to their clients' specific needs and interests.⁷⁶ Agents' willingness to steer their own course gave them a certain job security by keeping home demonstration relevant relative to rural families' needs. This reciprocal relationship benefited both agents and rural women, then, so that the interests of both became an entrenched focus of rural reform. Another way that home demonstration remained viable was by keeping abreast of rural reform outside the immediate circles of community and state.

Keeping HDAs in regular and expanded contact with the wider reform and education world was a priority for home demonstration leadership, who worked to secure opportunities for study and travel whenever feasible, as well as to maintain a network of relationships with

⁷⁶ Jane McKimmon to FG, 31 March 1936 (SC-21-7). Related to report reform was Gleason's particular involvement in an earlier attempt to revise the annual reports at the national level. In 1930, Gleason traveled to Washington to submit her ideas and those of the Vice-Director on how to make the annual reports more useful and more accurate. Plagued with confusing terms and more than enough room for inaccuracies, reports were a constant thorn in the side of all agents. A particular recommendation related to monthly reports, submitted by supervisory staff. Since the reports were never critiqued or responded to, and their data was never again factored into extension accomplishments, Gleason and Spencer wondered that monthly reports should be continued at all. See FG to APS, 30 January 1930 (SC-21-6).

related professional and civic organizations. Even before World War II, HDAs were in contact with international visitors and made visits overseas themselves to study home extension. Ola Powell from the national extension office hosted a Miss Christensen for a time in the United States, where Christensen hoped to learn enough of home demonstration methods to begin a similar program at home in Denmark. Upon her return to Europe in 1930, Christensen was accompanied by several HDAs. Furthermore, Volusia HDA Orpha Cole returned to work after a summer studying in Europe herself, and District HDA Lucy Belle Settle embarked on a trip to Cuba to attend an international sociology and political economics conference.⁷⁷

Closer to home, HDAs enjoyed a typically pleasant relationship with men's and women's civic organizations. Indeed, multiple memberships were encouraged, for it allowed agents to ingratiate themselves in their communities and expand their circle of allies. Seeking information on the extent to which HDAs were interacting with local groups, Gleason ticked off a long list of groups among which HDAs could find fellowship and influence: Florida Home Economics Association, Business and Professional Women's Clubs, local Woman's Club, county Federation of Women's Club, Parent-Teacher's Association, Chamber of Commerce and men's groups like Kiwanis and Rotary. She emphasized the potential benefits of fostering relationships with such groups, including scholarships, conferences, and opportunities to present home demonstration work and seek assistance and support. Of particular interest to Gleason was HDAs' involvement with and assistance from local clubs of the Federation of Women's Clubs. Home demonstration's relationship with the Federation was symbiotic, and the Federation made every effort to advertise and support what HDAs were doing across the state. Indeed, in her 1936 report to the Florida Federation, home

⁷⁷ FG to APS, 23 January 1930 (SC-21-6).

extension Chairman Mrs. D. H. Saunders concluded her review of home demonstration work and its ongoing potential with a strong mission statement: "Although we have made progress in promoting the cause of Home Demonstration Work, our work is not finished, until through our efforts and cooperation there is a home demonstration agent in every county and the work is made permanent and secure in all counties of Florida."⁷⁸ Clearly, home demonstration was no longer just an outgrowth of the Country Life Movement.

Women's groups interested in a variety of civic programs embraced home demonstration as a sister organization; by lending support, the Federation believed it had given home demonstration "a substantial background, prestige and foundation which it so richly deserves."⁷⁹ Flavia Gleason certainly was appreciative of such praise and the fellowship the Federation offered, and many home demonstration women were members of the Florida Federation themselves. Alliances were always useful, but it would be some time before home demonstration could stand on its own without the crutch of some prestigious women's group or the indulgence of male extension workers. In any event, home demonstration did function as part of a professional, educational and reformatory network that brought its agents the benefit of audiences and allies.

⁷⁸ FG to all home demonstration agents, 12 March 1932 (SC-21-6). Federation reports and histories are peppered with references to home demonstration work. For instance, Mildred White Wells addresses Federation support for home demonstration in a number of states, including Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi, summing up this way, "Work with rural women through home demonstration has been the rule in every state." (424) Wells also includes cooperative home work among the Federation's achievements. Particularly interesting for our story is the commitment of the Federation's first Vice-President, Mrs. W. S. Jennings, to placing an HDA in every county in the nation. Jennings was Florida's candidate for office. Wells, *Unity in Diversity: The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs* (Washington, D.C.: General Federation of Women's Clubs, 1953), 434, 441, 183, 443-44, 160, 424. Likewise, when State HDA Mary Keown began research for a history of Florida Extension, she contacted Wells for information on their work together, remarking, "I would like to show how the state federation and also the general federation has maintained an active interest since the beginning." See "Florida Federation of Women's Club's Support of Home Demonstration," (SC-158-1).

⁷⁹ Report of Chairman of Home Demonstration Division, Florida Federation of Women's Clubs. (SC-21-7).

Like most other aspects of extension life, however, professional development opportunities held pitfalls and personal disappointments for agents. Once again, success pivoted on negotiation and power. For example, travel requests varied widely in their potential for the Director's approval, based largely on cost and benefit to Florida extension. Two examples stand out among the many requests for travel and study which coursed through the stream of mail between Tallahassee and Gainesville. Usually, there was little difficulty securing permission to attend conferences like the American Land-Grant Association or Home Economics Association, because these were well-known meetings where Florida representatives could mingle to the overall benefit of the Service here.⁸⁰ In cases where a less routine meeting was called and Florida staff might attend, the source of the invitation could make a significant difference, as when Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins invited Home Improvement specialist Virginia Moore to Nashville for a 1935 regional conference on economic security. Included among the attendees were governors and delegates from twelve states. The Director expressed little hesitation in approving Moore's attendance.⁸¹

But some meetings were tailored to specific interests and skills. In these cases, professional development for its own sake was called into question, even when it could enhance the quality of extension education in Florida. Food and Marketing specialist Isabelle Thursby, for example, launched an enthusiastic campaign to attend a three week Canner's Short Course at Oregon State College in 1928. Writing to Flavia Gleason to describe the course and beg her support, Thursby expressed every conceivable reason why such a course

⁸⁰ For example, in the late 1920s, various agents were allowed to attend the Land-Grant College Association, the Boys' and Girls' Club Congress, the Southern Rural Electrification Conference, the National 4-H Club Camp, the American Home Economics Association, and a Tuskegee conference on black extension work. See WN to FG, 10 November 1925, FG to WN, 1 April 1926, FG to APS, 4 November 1927, and APS to FG, 8 November 1927 (SC-21-5).

⁸¹ Frances Perkins to Virginia P. Moore, 10 January 1935; FG to WN, 15 January 1935; WN to FG, 17 January 1935 (SC-21-7).

could benefit Florida extension. Thursby described the quality and content of the instruction offered. “Among many good courses offered is a series of lectures and laboratory demonstrations on fermenting, processing and spicing of cucumber pickles, including dills, and Sauerkraut for market,” she wrote. Not only that, but “Dr. W. V. Cruess of the College of Agriculture, Berkeley, California, advises that the school held in Corvallis [Oregon] is the one to attend” and “it offers many excellent courses in preservation of foods for small commercial canners. Many inquiries come to this office for information regarding cannery methods and supplies showing that more and more interest is developing in Florida along these lines, as you know.” Thursby added the “as you know” in her own hand, driving home the shrewd point she hoped she was making—the Oregon short course was not just of interest to her personally, it was of direct good to Floridians who were themselves right then seeking more of just this sort of information.

Thursby was wise in another way, though it ultimately brought her no more luck. The Oregon short course, she said, overlapped with “the beautiful National Orange Show” in California. Though her letter indicates that she expected to attend both, her description of the benefits to be gained from the Orange Show indicates an underlying strategy—she was hedging her bets to improve the odds she could be approved for at least one of the courses. To emphasize the real scientific and scholarly value of the Orange Show institute, Thursby concluded by reminding Gleason that “Just as California has set the standards for canned foods the world over, so they have taught us all that we know about crystallized fruits, citrus fruit pectin, making jelly and marmalade.” She closed on a note so earnest she must have understood well the line she was walking – “Miss Gleason, I beg of you – lend a kindly ear to my petition – and, let’s go!”⁸²

⁸² Isabelle Thursby to FG, 7 January 1928 (SC-21-5).

Thursby had every reason to hope that Newell would be duly impressed with the caliber of the two institutes she described, and the tangible benefits for rural Florida. However, she also knew that extension funds were not limitless and that a trip across the country would raise immediate financial alarms. Unfortunately, in her ardent appeal, she emphasized the very sorts of particulars that would cast her trip as too academic, giving Newell the reasons he needed to deny her request. Thursby was not without allies, though, and her prospects still seemed promising when Gleason brought the matter to the Director. Gleason's approach was as diplomatic as she could make it; certainly she also recognized the slim chances in favor of Thursby heading west on extension funds. She re-iterated the frequency with which Floridians and others sought Thursby's canning advice and instruction, adding that Miss Thursby "is rendering a valuable service to the State without being able to receive much subject-matter assistance from any source here or from the Washington office." After all, the Extension Service prided itself on sound scientific instruction and agents who were experts; naturally, they required more than their initial training to maintain a high standard of instruction. To Gleason, then, "it is easily seen that there is reason for her to feel the need of occasionally having the privilege of taking advantage of opportunities afforded by such a course as will be given at Corvallis, Oregon." Newell did not agree.⁸³

The Director's denial was lengthy, but clear. First, the Extension budget would not support such a trip, especially since the Board of Control was trying to boost salaries by curtailing travel, at Newell's suggestion. Second, since the Oregon meeting was a short course, the Service could not fund attendance because to do so violated the policy of agents furthering their education at their own expense. Third, Newell argued (rather nastily) that "Agricultural Extension employees are presumed to be at least fairly well prepared for doing

⁸³ FG to WN, 10 January 1928 (SC-21-5).

the work which they have in hand. Certainly, the state cannot be expected to pay a good salary for a person in any position and then go to the expense of several hundred dollars in preparing them for discharging the duties of that position.”⁸⁴ Together, Thursby and Gleason had made a reasonable case. Economizing certainly would keep expenses well below “hundreds of dollars,” and though Thursby was quite competent in her job, she wanted to enhance that competency for the good of the people she served. Moreover, Newell’s own rebuke pointed out that salaries were low, not “good.” Finally, the Extension Service *expected* agents to seek professional development throughout their tenure to stay abreast of the science. Certainly, Newell’s reminder that academic study was a matter for private finance was appropriate, but his wholesale dismissal of Thursby’s request speaks volumes about the impact of bureaucracy and power on the forward momentum of extension work.

Thursby was not alone in missing obvious opportunities as a result of bureaucratic priorities. Tough choices sometimes faced HDAs that cost them further opportunities so that they might maintain valuable ties already made. In the summer of 1934, Flavia Gleason officially recommended a leave of absence for District HDA Mary Keown to travel to Puerto Rico, where she would spend the next year establishing a home demonstration program. Director Newell approved the unpaid leave, but as the time of her return to Florida neared, Keown asked to stay a little longer, unwilling to leave the work that had just begun to blossom. She assured Newell of her loyalty to Florida, but “needless to say I am interested in my work here, and it has been an invaluable professional experience for me, as well as a pleasant one, personally.”⁸⁵ Newell agreed to extend her leave two months, but warned Gleason that if she and Keown had any ideas about Keown remaining longer, or continuing to

⁸⁴ WN to FG, 17 January 1928 (SC-21-5).

⁸⁵ Mary Keown to WN, 22 May 1935 (SC-21-7).

supervise the work in Puerto Rico while maintaining her duties in Florida, they should abandon all such plans.⁸⁶

Newell was correct that to straddle both positions would burden Keown and might jeopardize the quality of her work. An underlying issue, though, was control. Newell and Florida extension had “loaned” Keown to Puerto Rico to fulfill an agreement. Now that they had done their part, Keown was to return home. Though Newell did indicate to Gleason that Keown had some choice—“either Miss Keown will have to be our employee exclusively or Puerto Rico’s exclusively”—the fact was that he had ultimate say in where she established her work. He did not, at least in the extant correspondence, ask to speak with Keown or to explore possibilities of an interim replacement for her. As he had with Isabelle Thursby, the Director directed, indicating only that his word was final. He ran a tight ship in Florida extension, but his authority and dislike for loose ends pre-empted further negotiation.

We might be inclined to assume that shutting doors against certain projects was the result of callous racism, sexism or some other spite. However, I think those limitations are simply part of the contemporary biases built into the bureaucratic priorities of the Service. Money and time were limited resources and, unfortunately, those furthest from the extension core—black agents and all home demonstration agents—received the smaller shares of whatever the Service could offer. Reliance on familiar models of inequitable treatment also obscures the realities of local situations that are integral to the home demonstration experience. For example, we might assume that a black HDA would always find herself crammed into a tiny, ill-equipped office, while her white counterpart had more room and

⁸⁶ Evidence of Keown’s continuing professional and personal commitment to Puerto Rico extension, however, appears in her correspondence. Among the piles of mail Keown received as State HDA, a post she inherited when Gleason resigned in 1936, was *El Heraldo de Extension*, Puerto Rico’s extension newspaper. Almost a decade after leaving Puerto Rico, she kept abreast of how agriculture, home demonstration and 4-H were developing there. Scrapbook—Home Demonstration work (SC-158-6).

resources at her disposal. And, we might also assume that any female agent's facilities would fall short of any male agent's.

However, if one maxim is certain in studying home demonstration, it is that we cannot assume anything. In 1953, Hillsborough County's black HDA, Sudella Ford, described her office, and tiny and ill-equipped it was not. According to Ford, her office was located in the Tampa Urban League Building, and covered three rooms, including an office, workroom and kitchen. The office was fully equipped with "a desk, two filing cabinets, cutting table, chairs, bookcase, telephone, magazine rack, electric fan, heater and a portable sewing machine." Moreover, the workroom was equally outfitted and had an additional typewriter, mimeograph machine and bulletin rack. The kitchen, through the generosity of the Tampa Electric Company and county commissioners, was well-equipped with a G. E. electric range, Kelvinator refrigerator, waffle iron, electric roaster, built-in cabinets, a table, chairs, and kitchen stool, a pressure cooker, and a can sealer. Home demonstration owned everything but the kitchen sink, which was the property of the Urban League. The kitchen also was stocked with cooking utensils and dishes donated by home demonstration club members "and others interested in the project." Not only did Ford have the equipment she needed, she had what all agents dreamed of and pleaded for—an efficient, competent, productive part-time secretary. The office was neat and orderly, "a demonstration in itself."⁸⁷ Hillsborough agents, white and black, benefited from working in a county with a substantial population (so large that up to four HDAs worked with it), a substantial rural and urban base, *and* substantial resources. Home demonstration work there was well-entrenched; HDAs had been in the county since at least 1922 and continued working there unabated throughout the years I am covering here.

⁸⁷ Sudella Ford, Hillsborough AR 1953 (NARA-33.6-57), 4.

Not all agents were so fortunate. When white agent Miriam Edwards began new work in Franklin County in 1953, she had much of the equipment she needed, but none of the convenience. She and the agricultural agent shared an office in the county courthouse. Though the location was not unusual, the room they had use of was the Grand Jury room, and the agents had to vacate it twice a year when the jury was in session. One afternoon each week, the highway patrolman also used the office. The three shared a single storage closet. No clerical help was available, so the agents did all that work themselves, including going to another office to use its mimeograph machine. Fortunately, by 1957, agent Ann Jeter could report that the agents had gained the assistance of a part-time secretary, and they had created a new storage system for their bulletins. Though they still stored them in the courthouse's witness room, they had been able to build shelves for them rather than keeping them in boxes and hunting for them before each use.⁸⁸ In contrast to Hillsborough County, Franklin was small and undeveloped, home demonstration work was new and unfamiliar, and the county did not have the financial resources—or inclination yet—to provide more comfortably for extension agents. Being white did not privilege Edwards or Jeter in this situation.

That is not to say that bias had no impact, for it did hinder programs and cause unnecessary delays. But more was at work than misogynist tendencies or virulent racism. Some battles were personal, but most often, the elaborate negotiating and hedging were the result of everyone having to answer to someone else. Power struggles, too, reveal a remarkable capacity for discretion among Service personnel. No matter how frustrated any one agent became, he or she officially maintained a politically astute perspective, knowing that diplomacy could not win every battle, but it might win the war. Most HDAs, including Flavia Gleason, understood that that their work simply was not the first priority of the Service.

⁸⁸ Miriam Edwards, Franklin AR 1953 (NARA-33.6-56), 3; Ann Pierce Jeter, Franklin AR 1957 (NARA-33.6-56), 2.

That said, Gleason was not content to leave HDAs on the fringes. On the contrary, she defended home demonstration whenever she felt it had been slighted in some way. In true mother-bear fashion, in 1934 Gleason wrote to J. Francis Cooper, in charge of publicity for Florida extension, demanding to know why home demonstration work had been omitted from a recent *Agricultural News Sheet* regarding an upcoming Farmers' Institute. There was no mistaking her tone as she outlined, with nary a comma to catch her breath, her disappointment and resentment:

I would so appreciate it and it would be so much more helpful to all of us and help us maintain a more cooperative spirit if care would always be taken to include our part of the work wherever both phases of the Extension Service are represented. For instance, Mrs. Taylor worked with Mr. Moore in starting the institute and members of our staff were right there to help with it last year. I know because I was there myself and several others were and I know, too, that several of our members will be there to help with it this year and yet as we look over this article no mention whatsoever is made of our part. . . . I don't, of course, like to mention these things and I only do it for the good of the work and I do know how earnestly our people are working to make this particular institute a successful and most worthwhile one to attend.

Particularly exasperating was that this discourtesy was not the first; Gleason began her letter by noting that "I am always asked why this is when our part of the work is omitted."⁸⁹ The fight for full recognition as a permanent part of the Extension Service was ongoing, but it was particularly appropriate that Gleason was defending her agents' against being dismissed during a Farmers' Institute. These institutes had been a nineteenth century venue for rural men and women to seek advice and education together; women's persistent attendance at them inspired the creation of sessions designed for and by women. Though home demonstration had decades ahead of it still, in a way Gleason's 1934 defense represented a climatic moment. The ongoing quest to make agrarian reform count for women had reached a critical, if unassuming, juncture, a moment which the State HDA seized to demand respect for home demonstration and promote its continued evolution. As a testament to the stressful pace and

⁸⁹ FG to J. Francis Cooper, 23 July 1934 (SC-21-6).

complex arrangement of extension work, A.P. Spencer concluded a letter to Flavia Gleason in 1936 with an ardent desire: “I hope, someday, we will get over this rush of things and act like normal people.”⁹⁰ Spencer’s lament reflects just the sort of dynamism powering the Extension Service.

The daily grind of extension work reveals it to be more than a reform world of lofty ideals and noble sentiment. That all existed, but it was only the inspiration passed down from ages of rural theorists, reformers and, finally, the Country Life Movement and Seaman Knapp. One of the early steps that kept extension alive was its evolution from inspiration to institution, so that it did not live and die as a reform urge alone. HDAs became more than just progressive-minded do-gooders concerned with the state of Jefferson’s feminine yeomanry. The HDA learned from her home economics training and combined it with her rural interests to become a professional reformer and educator. Indeed, home demonstration personnel had earlier ties to professional venues than their male agricultural counterparts. For example, the *Journal of Home Economics* began in 1909 and eventually became the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* in the 1990s. In contrast, the *Journal of Extension*, the official professional outlet for extension personnel, did not begin until 1963, in the midst of a decided effort to entrench professionalism within extension. Though the *Journal of Extension* has as much to do with home extension as with agricultural, home demonstration’s ties to a broader professional reform network via home economics meant that its professional context was in place well before the Cooperative Extension Service made a concerted move in that direction.

Agrarian reform became increasingly democratic and feminine over time because reformers, educators and clients operated on the belief that the problems home demonstration addressed were immediate; to wait for ideal support was simply not an option. The long-term

⁹⁰ APS to FG, 19 March 1936 (SC-21-7).

impact reaches beyond home demonstration itself. As agents continued to evolve as professionals, they solidified their own permanence in the reform system. This meant, in turn, that HDAs could offer rural women reliable allies and a committed voice for their concerns. Over time, home demonstration's borders became more fluid, embracing women not necessarily part of the original program. This meant not only that black women had a much needed outlet for their needs but that, over time, urban, low-income, Native American and immigrant women all came under the home demonstration umbrella, even as it continued to work for meaningful improvement in rural life. Women themselves became a more central component of the rural reform dynamic, which had been churning for centuries with women only on its periphery. HDAs' increased skill in professional preservation proved useful when it came time to navigate changes within home demonstration programs. Though certain phases of work, like food preservation, remained central to the home extension curriculum, each underwent significant changes over the course of this study. Just as home demonstration had demonstrated an aptitude for negotiation, HDAs demonstrated a similar willingness to adapt their expectations, teaching and skills to match the shifts in preservation technology that took place as traditional canning gave way to freezing. In doing so, HDAs ensured not only their own relevance as educators, but helped their clientele achieve and retain greater control over fundamental resources.

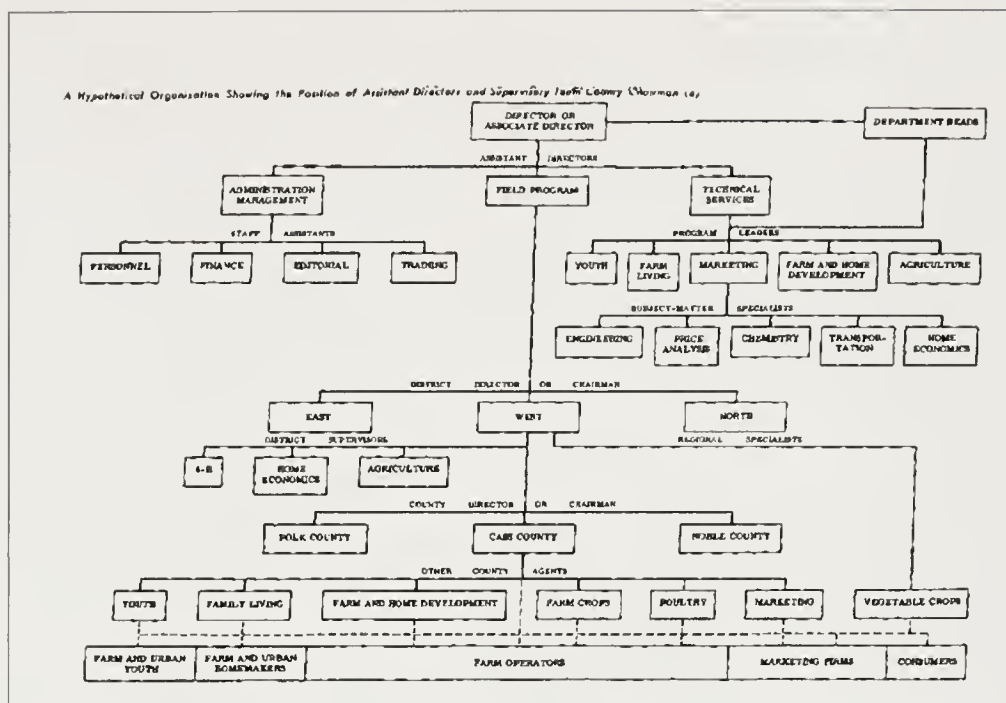


Figure 3-1. A 1966 hypothetical representation of the Extension Service from the state level downward. Source: *The Cooperative Extension Service*, ed. H. C. Sanders (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 42.

Jacksonville, Florida,
P. O. Box 1093
April 12, 1932

Dr. P. K. Yonge, Chairman
State Board of Control
Pensacola, Florida.

Dear Sir:

In as much as more than nine weeks have elapsed since my registering a complaint, in behalf of the Englewood Woman's Club, with the State Home Demonstration Agent, both verbally and written and I have not received any word whatsoever from Miss Gleason I am taking the liberty of placing this matter in your hands, for action and a report.

I am not at all surprised in not having received a reply from Miss Gleason for this breach of etiquette seems characteristic and prevalent in the Home Demonstration Department for, I am told, a previous complaint registered by another club evidently received the same treatment and the local agent seemed to take pride in boasting that any such complaints sent to Tallahassee were merely referred back to her and of course no action taken in the matter; this accounts for my going to Tallahassee for an interview with Miss Gleason prior to my writing her. Now, as a citizen of Duval County, I am entitled to, and demand the courtesies of acknowledgment, hence my referring this matter to you.

So that you and members of the board can familiarize yourselves with the proceedings to date I am attaching hereto copies of my letters covering our complaint. You will note the main reason for our complaint is that the local Home Demonstration Agent is the direct cause of not only dividing our Woman's Club but also has caused considerable dissension among the citizenry of our small Community and this, in our estimation, is not the duties of a "paid" public worker.

Appreciating an early reply, we are

Respectfully yours,

Englewood Woman's Club.

MRS. LOUIS VON HOFEN

Figure 3-2. Mrs. Louis Von Hofen, Duval County resident and former home demonstration club member, to Chairman of the Board of Control P. K. Yonge, registering her intense displeasure with home demonstration in Duval, and Florida. 1932. Source: Correspondence, Flavia Gleason, 1932 (SC-21-6).

CHAPTER 4

OUT OF THE CAN AND INTO THE FREEZER: FOOD PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGY AND HOME DEMONSTRATION



Figure 4-1. Source: John Rose, "Snuffy Smith," *Gainesville Sun* 7 July 2005.

This "Snuffy Smith" cartoon may represent a caricature to some people; here apparently is a woman so backward she thinks cords of wood and canned food are the same as insurance. In fact, this cartoon perfectly illustrates just that—canning *was* insurance! In some ways, however, canning did seem like a technological has-been to many Florida families with whom HDAs made contact. Though canning, either in glass jars or in tins, had been a food preservation mainstay for decades, by the mid-twentieth century its popularity was faltering in the face of a newer and seemingly cooler technology, freezing. HDAs found that they had quite a battle on their hands—fighting to keep women preserving, and fighting to keep themselves ahead of rapid changes in preservation technology. Home demonstration proved capable of navigating the changes in food preservation to stay both resourceful and relevant, remaining as dynamic as the technology.

Food preservation provides us with a vital clue in the home extension longevity riddle. Home demonstration's food conservation work continued to anchor it within a truly ancient, and venerable, tradition. How foodstuffs have been conserved has evolved with our knowledge of science and technology, our need for certain nutritional benefits, and our politics and social customs. But the core principle upon which food preservation is based has not—

waste not, want not. Preserving food reinforced home demonstration's relevance because food preservation itself had not lost relevance.¹

But reinforcing relevance and ensuring relevance is not the same thing, and HDAs faced a particular challenge as food technology evolved. Prior to about 1950, home demonstration did not have exceptional difficulty convincing women that preservation was a necessity – world wars and economic depression made that quite clear.² But after this period, circumstances changed considerably, and women's options for stocking the pantry expanded, making home demonstration's role in quality of life issues less apparent. Given that challenge, this chapter's primary focus is on the period following the end of the Second World War. In addition to county agent reports, I am utilizing most often the post-1945 annual

¹I agree wholeheartedly with Peter Coclanis' bold assertions regarding the central importance of food history in understanding human history. Everyone has to eat sometime, after all. In covering the crucial trends and developments in American food history, Coclanis cites with particular dismay "the complete omission of developments in food processing and preservation." An obligatory nod to Gustavus Swift does not cut it. Peter Coclanis, "Food Chains: The Burdens of the (Re)Past," *Agricultural History* 72 (1998): 660-674. Melissa Walker has aptly differentiated between certain phases of home demonstration work as either impractical and unrealistic or practical and realistic – food conservation fell into the latter category. Unlike home improvement, which had some ambiguous motivations, methods and implications, food conservation met a very tangible need and recognized rural women's "central role in the family economy." See Walker's *All We Knew Was to Farm. Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 126. Poignant proof that food preservation has been more about necessity than luxury is in Margaret Hagood's 1937 survey of Southern tenant women. Quite often, Hagood found that barely adequate homes, lacking extra space, cupboards or shelving, were nevertheless stocked with canned food, jars of fruits and vegetables stacked in bedroom and kitchen corners. Margaret Hagood, *Mothers of the South. Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1939, 1996), 98.

²Katherine Jellison notes that even in the Midwest, where many farm women were suspicious at best, and hostile at worst, towards home demonstration, during World War I, many of those same women came to see HDAs as respectable and useful. In Jellison's example, the shift in attitude came because home extension staff left off pushing home appliance acquisition in favor of food production and conservation – in other words, shifting from impractical, unwanted advice to timely, constructive education. The feeling did not persist, emphasizing the tenuous position home demonstration held in many communities. Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power. Farm Women and Technology, 1913 – 1963* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 24.

reports of Florida's various food conservation specialists, whose analysis reveals trends and issues affecting the entire state.³

HDAs' navigation of food preservation technology spotlights two of home demonstration's fundamental strengths—commitment to core principles and mastery of changing circumstances. Conservation was a core principle of home demonstration's "Live-at-Home" matrix, and for both their benefit and the benefit of Florida's rural and urban families, HDAs kept abreast of evolving methods and encouraged women to become familiar with and use them also. That is not to say that rural women had not canned before home demonstration, and that many did not continue to can without any involvement in home demonstration—HDAs did not have a monopoly on skill, experience or resourcefulness. Indeed, it was women's resourcefulness that gave home demonstration a boost. In some cases, HDAs were able to teach women the basics of food preservation, and start them in its practice for the first time. Just as often, HDAs simply were helping women refine existing techniques, helping them to do more by demonstrating easier, faster methods or helping them to do better by teaching them about preservation's scientific underpinnings.⁴ Indeed, part of home

³ The specialists include Grace Neely (1949-1950), Alice Cromartie (1951-1954, 1958-1959) and Lena Sturges (1955-1957).

⁴ Lu Ann Jones cites an example of rural women's own ability to adapt what they had to fit what they needed. Women working on tobacco farms in eastern North Carolina often employed the heat from curing fires and the time spent tending them to iron clothes, cook meat, bake bread or boil water in iron pots for canning fruit. As Jones remarks, "the image of women canning, cooking, and ironing in barns neatly captures the interdependence of farm and household economies and of women's resourcefulness. Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work. Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12. Jones' analysis is part of an ongoing discussion about the impact of reforms like home demonstration on rural women's place in the farm economy, specifically because most twentieth-century reformers tended to advocate roles that reinforced the separate spheres philosophy prevalent in urban families. So, one could argue that home demonstration would undo the resourcefulness of rural women by confining them to completing household duties in the house, not in the barn. But I am certain that aside from gender divisions and their implications, home demonstration's impact on rural women via food preservation would have been positive – in the barn or the kitchen, more and better canning meant more and better meals for families. That is not to say that a woman's only role in the farm economy was as chef and nutritionist, but there is no denying that putting food on the table *was* a central concern of mothers and wives.

demonstration's durability came from capitalizing on what women already were capable of and refining it.

Since I have now mentioned women and technology, and I even titled the dissertation after a REA film, it would seem natural that I would emphasize electrification. But I will not, except for its impact on preservation technology. Historians already have provided capable treatments of rural electrification. More to the point, they have dealt with technology's particular impact on women—and women's impact on technology. Katherine Jellison, Ronald Tobey, Audra Wolfe, Ruth Cowan, and Ronald Kline provide more than enough analysis to allow us to zero in on technology in a different light.⁵ Most of the historiography on technology, especially in the rural South, focuses upon two main themes, electrification and farm mechanization. Both connote “progress,” newness, and a departure from contemporary work patterns and lifeways.

Though I agree that these implications are appropriate, I hope to look at technology through a very precise, and less common, lens. For example, discussions about farmhouse electrification typically focus on the most sought after and heavily advertised electric labor-savers such as irons or washing machines, or the introduction of the biggest labor-saver of all, running water; in contrast, I want to focus solely on food preservation—technology that did not depend upon electrification, but technology that electrification profoundly altered.⁶ That is not to say we have abandoned “power” in this chapter, for food conservation is all about

⁵ On technology in general, see Alan I. Marcus and Howard P. Segal, *Technology in America. A Brief History* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 64. On New Deal-era electrification and technology, see Ronald Tobey, *Technology as Freedom. The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996). Tobey's book is one of the best for exploring not just the mechanics of New Deal-era electrification, but its socio-cultural motivations and implications. Regarding women and technology, see Jellison's *Entitled to Power*; Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country. Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Audra Wolfe, “How Not to Electrocute the Farmer”: Assessing Attitudes Towards Electrification on American Farms, 1920-1940,” *Agricultural History* 74 (Spring 2000): 515-529.

⁶ For an overview of food technology's history, see R. J. Forbes, “The Rise of Food Technology (1500-1900),” *Janus* 47 (2): 101-27 and (3): 139-155.

power, power in expertise and power over resources, that transcends the literal current of electricity.

Before I get into the details of who preserved what and how, let me discuss the relationship between women and technology in general, especially in terms of labor relief. Home demonstration was acutely aware of the average rural woman's work load. Though a HDA could recommend time-saving housework plans, or help a family delegate responsibility, both home demonstration workers and rural women often looked to some device or other—a technology—to alleviate various labors.⁷ The intense labor demands of much rural

⁷ Since I am so freely using the term "technology," I will clarify my meaning. I am using the term primarily in its anthropological sense, as a body of knowledge or skills available to a people. Though actual machines figure into this discussion – the pressure cooker or freezer, for example, I think the most important sense of technology here is expertise, skill and science. In a seminal 1966 book, Brooke Hindle called for an integration of science, especially social science, with a history of technology. But, Hindle noted, pairing science and technology was not easy, partly because they seemed to have little in common. Hindle explained, "Science and technology have different objectives. Science seeks basic understanding – ideas and concepts usually expressed in linguistic or mathematical terms. Technology seeks means for making and doing things. It is a question of process, always expressible in terms of three-dimensional 'things.'" Modern Americans have the opposite problem – separating science and technology. Whereas "during the Middle Ages the great technological advances owed little to science or to those who pursued science, . . . those engaged in the space technology of the present [Hindle's or ours] are sometimes at a loss to draw a line between the science and the technology they use." See Hindle's essay, "The Exhilaration of Early American Technology," reprinted in *Early American Technology: Making and Doing Things from the Colonial Era to 1850*, ed. Judith A. McGaw (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 42. In her introductory essay to *Early American Technology*, editor Judith McGaw speculates on why the history of technology in the nation's earliest past has garnered so little attention. She suspects that technology just did not appear relevant to any discussion of early American life and development. In contrast, modern technology appears highly relevant given the post-1960s academic awareness of technology's "great social, environmental and cultural challenges." Moreover, McGaw argues that historians of the modern era are more likely to embrace technology because they live it everyday. As Hindle had argued, technology was, in part, a "satisfying emotional experience." Thus, McGaw reasons that so many scholars have written about technology – "space vehicles, ballistic missiles, nuclear power plants, television, airplanes, automobiles, computers, automated facilities, or modern household technology" – because it "provided them with a seminal emotional experience." See McGaw's essay in *Early American Technology: Making and Doing Things from the Colonial Era to 1850*, ed. Judith A. McGaw (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 2-3. I am inclined to agree – we are compelled to understand and explore what already seems most familiar, and likely most historians of modern America see little in the butter churn, or pressure cooker, that is relative to their own lives. However, inspired by Joan Jensen's work, this is just the sort of technology link I wish to make in this chapter. There have been critical technological changes (again, speaking anthropologically), often to do with mundane domestic chores, that have had profound effects on the lives of those involved in these everyday tasks. Jensen's book, *Loosening the Bonds*, on mid-Atlantic farm women in the late colonial and early national periods explores the impact of changes in butter-making technology upon farm women's role in the economy and, subsequently, in their lives. What is most fascinating about Jensen's

housekeeping proved an ongoing challenge for reformers trying to convince families to remain in the countryside. Electrification in particular seemed the answer to lightening drudgery and promoting well-being.⁸ Not only could electricity relieve a woman of the physical burdens of supplying her own power to accomplish everyday tasks, but it could empower her by making her time flexible—if she wanted to delay her sewing until evening, she could, without the traditional fear of losing her light. Indeed, technology like electric power appeared to hold the key not just to ease, but independence.

Despite the promises of domestic freedom made by the REA, TVA and other electric providers and appliance companies, it is not difficult to see that flexibility did not, in fact, necessarily mean a lighter work load. A woman simply had more time in her day, and not

analysis is that she focuses upon a technology that most would not consider technological at all! No power but human muscle and ingenuity was at work; butter churns were not going to power steamships or build railroads or fly to the moon. Likewise, I hope to emphasize the process of food preservation as an everyday task with profound implications for rural families and HDAs. See Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds. Mid-Atlantic Farm Women 1750-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986). I also am inspired by Peter McClelland's *Sowing Modernity: America's First Agricultural Revolution*. McClelland deals in details, the supposedly mundane intricacies of agricultural change via its implements and procedures. *Sowing Modernity* deals with farm machinery the way most historians looking at "farm mechanization" do not – not as the battle between machine and draft animal, or machine and human, but at the subtle changes in actual implements that reaped big impacts. For example, in the Middle Ages, the advent of the metal plow became one of the most crucial developments of the period, for it ensured a much more secure, much larger harvest, which led to a decline in hunger, then a population surge. McClelland discusses the same sorts of apparently innocuous changes. Their significance lies in their motivation ("Is there a better way"?), and in their cumulative effect, an agricultural revolution with such great ramifications McClelland has left their full exploration to a second book.

⁸ In Britain, *The Electrical Age for Women* journal advocated, educated and advertised to women about the many benefits of an electric home. Published by the Electrical Association for Women, the journal treated women as educated, rational and influential consumers of all things electric. Moreover, it did not demur when it came to making the most of an electrical hook-up. Rather than trip and strangle on numerous cords hanging about the room from a single fixture (as many American rural homemakers did), the journal encouraged women to have as many outlets as possible in each room. See, for example, The Editor, "How Many 'Outlets' Have You in Your Home?" *The Electrical Age for Women* 1 (April 1928): 289. Britain's Electric Supply Act of 1926 ensured that the current was flowing much sooner there than here in the United States, where the Depression prompted wide-scale electrification via the REA and TVA. In rural America, making the everyday easier for women was more than just creating convenience – it was part of a wider initiative to make the countryside livable.

necessarily for leisure.⁹ Home demonstration's work in these labor-saving schemes followed much the same patterns and promised the same domestic utopia—reduced work, increased satisfaction, wholesome modernity. But technology, as I have stressed, was not just devoted to electrically breezing through the housework. And I am confident that, though housework gadgetry had ambiguous significance for rural women, those technologies related to food preservation were of unquestionable, constructive importance, for these technologies truly could empower women.

It was critical that HDAs kept women involved in safe food preservation practices to ensure that “Live-at-Home” principles did not deteriorate, and the stability of the rural home with them. But HDAs found that they had to overcome certain impediments to spreading their message. For example, early work with rural women made it clear to HDAs that science was not equally appealing to everyone. As we saw with the women Hagood encountered, and the thousands of years of people before them, preservation could be done without any formal training or scientific understanding. Success was not uncommon with easily processed foods like tomatoes. Early HDAs ran up against this clash between training and experience as they began demonstrating preservation; agents, especially new ones, felt bolstered by their education, but women often were unimpressed by the range of agents' knowledge.¹⁰ Home demonstration success depended on impressing women with not only knowledge, but genuine concern, tact and friendliness. Once they gained an audience, HDAs could enhance their own

⁹ Julie Wosk has studied the relationship between women and the machine, especially as represented visually. She cautions that “the very idea of women being transformed by machines sometimes needs rethinking and qualification.” New electric appliances were lauded as labor-savers that could transform a harried housewife into a “loving women, bubbling over with mirth and joy.” In reality, it became obvious to observers that faster work meant more time to do more work; “these new machines often only entrenched women more deeply into the domestic sphere and added to the tasks they were expected to perform.” Julie Wosk, *Women and the Machine. Representations from the Spinning Wheel to the Electronic Age* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), xv.

¹⁰ For an example, see Jones, 111.

standing by gearing talks to ways that women could do as they always had done, but more easily.

Under the best circumstances, however, preserving foodstuffs was not necessarily easy, and not all women who canned did so using what HDAs stressed were up-to-date methods. To convince women to preserve in sufficient quantities, HDAs had to help them learn ways to make canning less of a chore. There were two dangers; first, women might can incorrectly and risk spoilage and, second, women might stop canning altogether as other demands on their time, like work outside the home, mounted. The difficulty inherent in preserving some foods is evident in a bulletin on meat canning. In 1929, food conservation specialist Isabelle Thursby warned canners that, since pressure cookers were widely available, it was imperative that they be used for canning meats. Failing to do so created a significant risk of bacterial growth and spoiled food. However, Thursby understood that even for commercial canners, meat preservation was among the most difficult procedures.¹¹ Once freezers became available, either privately owned or at community lockers, it is not surprising that the amount of meat preserved increased quite significantly.

HDAs believed they could keep women informed of changes in food technology that worked in their favor, making canning easier and faster. The immediate benefit was that more women canned more food; the long-term effect was putting women back in control of their families' resources by putting them back in control of the necessary technology. If women did not feel overwhelmed by the procedures and principles of food preservation, they were much more likely to stay with it. HDAs, then, served as conduits to transmit new developments and re-ground core principles, reinforcing their own relevance and assisting women seeking greater security.

¹¹ Isabelle S. Thursby, *Home Canning of Meat*, Bulletin 51 (May 1929), 5.

It was increasingly the case, though, that HDAs, not rural women, found themselves outdistanced by changes in food technology. Vital to their survival, however, they worked to keep apace and continue serving as educators to those whose own expertise was completely lacking. We will see that, by the 1950s, food technology had moved so far beyond basic canning and commercially available foods were so widespread that many working in home economics and home extension had little, if any, training in food preservation. Florida women's demand for such instruction, however, did not disappear. As HDAs discovered, "laying by" never really goes out of style.

The twentieth century demand for a reliable way to secure foodstuffs was not new, but part of a long history of food preservation techniques and developments. The actual history of food preservation gives us an important clue to home demonstration's own long standing in the field. Over time, trial and error gave way to increasingly science-based preservation technologies, enhancing the place of the trained professional in the scheme of successful preservation. This reliance on, indeed expectation of, expertise carved out an ideal niche for the HDA. Agents acted as experts in canning to train women in the correct method of harvesting, preserving and preparing food. It is little wonder that food preservation technology influenced the dynamism of the home demonstration program, since the technology itself was so dynamic. To modern consumers a glass jar full of tomatoes does not conjure up visions of technological advancement. But *how* those tomatoes were preserved is *all* about technology. Mrs. Von Hofen, who had so vehemently criticized Duval HDA Pearl Lafitte, may not have known a Kerr jar when she saw one, but it and its Mason and Ball companions were vessels for change. Canning speaks volumes about progress and advancing technology. Pressure canners were the tools of choice for demonstration agents, and they encouraged women either to purchase one or make use of community canners. As the contemporary "PC," they were far advanced beyond more traditional preservation in brine, or

even the water bath method long used in New England. But even basic canning has not always been the preservation means of choice. The time between pots and pressure cookers witnessed a remarkable persistence in efforts to more effectively preserve, and so conserve, food. With their attention to both familiar and new methodologies and their commitment to security and health, HDAs would have been at home in any food preservation era, for these principles did not change over time.

Proof that preserving foodstuffs has ever been about technological change is evident in the history of preservation. Why people stored food—to avert famine, reduce malnutrition and provide variety in the diet—did not change much, but how they stored food—salting, curing, brining, drying, potting, cellars, jars, cans, freezers and irradiation—certainly did. The primary motivator seems to have come straight from Peter McClelland’s thesis: “Is there a better way?” The earliest and simplest way humans stored the glut for the famine was drying. Successful drying depended entirely on climactic conditions, but it was possible in a variety of climates. As primitive as drying was burial, good for both meat and dairy foods. Burying foods deeply kept them safe from predation and air-borne bacteria and cool enough to prevent microbial growth. Another option for early civilizations was fire-based, by parching cereals and smoking flesh. It is worth noting that these simple ancient and Iron Age techniques are still used in some parts of the world today, a testament to their basic efficacy.¹² Significant advancement in preservation technology came with new ingredients and better vessels. The widespread availability of salt, when added to flesh, sped up the drying process and allowed the meat to be dried further, smoked or preserved in a broth. By the Middle Ages, air-tight

¹² For example, as late as the 1940s, fishermen on the Faroe Islands hung their fish to dry in the cold air and buried cod in the cold earth, and some Chinese continue to air-dry ducks. C. Anne Wilson, “Preserving Food to Preserve Life: The Response to Glut and Famine from Early Times to the End of the Middle Ages,” in *Waste Not, Want Not. Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 6-15.

vessels ranging from skins and bladders to pie-crusts and pottery were in use to prevent contamination of food and allow for long-term, safe storage.¹³

Until the sixteenth century, and for an extended period afterwards, there remained a major flaw in food preservation, however—the technologies in existence were designed for meat, grain and dairy, not fruits or vegetables. Some fruits, in some climates, could be dried, but sugar proved the best way to keep raw fruits accessible over time.¹⁴ By the 1660s, though, another advance was in the works, this time through fruit bottling—though preservers did not always recognize that boiling fruit in a corked bottle to achieve sterility was an advance. Recipes for such preservation appeared at least as early as the 1660s, compiled by scientist Robert Boyle, whose cohorts in the Royal Society had been working for some time on improved preservation practices. Then, in 1795, the French Ministry of Interior offered a prize for developing a preservation process that allowed foods to be transported, and preserved, over both distance and time. A chef, distiller, and confectioner, Nicholas Appert,

¹³ Wilson, 16-27; Peter Brears, “Pots for Potting: English Pottery and Its Role in Food Preservation in the Post-Medieval Period,” in *Waste Not, Want Not. Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 32. Brears notes that by 1569, using pottery vessels was so widespread and effective that all air-tight food preservation came to be called “potting,” just as we tend to refer to all air-tight food preservation today as “canning.”

¹⁴ Preservers had attempted keeping raw fruit fresh and safe by burying (laying in sawdust, hay or oatmeal), drying, refrigeration (immersed in cold streams), pickling (use wine, beer and vinegar), coating it in wax, and potting (a potentially successful method if the fruit was very clean). Where and when sugar was available, fruit could be preserved as candy (more sugar than fruit) and marmalades or whole fruit jams (twice or thrice boiled fruits, combined with a syrup or jelly to set without destroying the fruit). The jam methods in particular were quite successful and mirror modern methodologies, though in the sixteenth century preservers did not yet understand why their attempts worked. Jennifer Stead, “Necessities and Luxuries: Food Preservation from the Elizabethan to the Georgian Era,” in *Waste Not, Want Not. Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 88-90. In her study of colonial New Englanders’ food preservation, Sarah McMahon argues that cold-cellar storage remained commonplace until the mid-nineteenth century, as families sought ways to gain greater control over the security of stores against the elements and seasonal variety. It was clear that advances in preservation technology were crucial, for “as long as families relied either on cellars for cold storage or on pickling methods of preserving for their bulk stores of food, food preservation would remain an uncertain link in the food process.” Sarah McMahon, “Laying Foods By: Gender, Dietary Decisions, and the Technology of Food Preservation in New England Households, 1750-1850,” in *Early American Technology. Making and Doing Things from the Colonial Era to 1850*, ed. Judith A. McGaw (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 180-81.

began, and completed, the challenge. Building on the boiled bottle technology, Appert eventually developed what we have come to know as canning, preserving foods by sealing them in glass jars and boiling them. Most important, Appert's work included a variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as meats, jams and dairy.

What Appert accomplished was precisely the control over resources that HDAs advocated; in 1809, the French paper *Courrier de l'Europe* praised Appert's work as "'the art of fixing the seasons; he makes spring, summer and fall live in bottles similarly to the gardener protecting his tender plants in greenhouses against the perils of the seasons.'" On March 15, 1809, the Société d'Encouragement pour l'Industrie Nationale approved Appert's canning as a successful and viable preservation process. Peter Durand, of Britain, then patented canning in tin; tin later became the vessel of choice among commercial canners, and many HDAs, for its low cost and ease of use. Durand's apprentice, William Underwood, brought the canning process to the United States in 1817. In Boston, Underwood tutored Thomas Kensett in canning, and in 1825 Kensett received the first American patent for canning.¹⁵ From that point forward, canning was a significant commercial, as well as home, industry.

Proof of increasingly professional standards is evident in Progressive-era attempts to enhance the safety and uniformity of canned goods. The actual construction of tin canning vessels evolved to become as sanitary as possible, by refining the construction materials and process and minimizing human contact with the vessels at every stage. By 1896, commercial tins were created, start to finish, without ever having been touched by human hands. These tins came to be called "sanitary cans." Purity was crucial in preserved foods (especially after

¹⁵ It was not only the French army that required improved rations; until tinned meat became available in the early nineteenth-century, the English army and navy complained of less than satisfactory food stores. Stead, 92-96; Alina Surmacka Szczesniak, "The Nicholas Appert Medalists. A Reflection of the Growth of Food Science and Technology," *Food Technology* (September 1992): 144-45; Marcus and Segal, *Technology in America*, 64.

the meat-packing horrors revealed by Upton Sinclair). To ensure that quality standards extended across the nation's canning centers, canners developed trade associations, another link between food production, consumption and preservation and Progressivism's trademark professionalism.¹⁶ Still, sanitation and uniformity achievements did not spell the end to changes in conservation technology, so HDAs and rural women, like professional canners, could not yet relax.

In the century that followed, food preservation technology continued to change, sometimes so rapidly that schooled preservers had difficulty keeping up. The author of a 1908 German guide to preserving fruits, vegetables and meats reported delaying publication because "the continued introduction of improvements in the last few years prevented an exhaustive report being drawn up." Another contemporary noted his attempt in his own volume to reflect the progress made; for his third edition, he "subjected [the guide] to a thorough revision, and [had] weeded out everything that has become antiquated." That was in 1912.¹⁷ Keeping up with continuing changes proved a challenge to the entire home demonstration staff throughout our period, but its ability to do so was necessary to remain relevant and helpful.

By the time that HDAs were teaching rural women to can with pressure cookers – the latest technology—that technology was seemingly irrelevant, at least in the home. Commercial canneries were cranking out inexpensive and widely available meats, vegetables, and fruit, everything that a rural homemaker was putting up herself. Home agents recognized

¹⁶ Trade associations for canners attempted to unite the major canning centers, one in California and the other on the East Coast between Baltimore and New Jersey, and their combined work force of 50,000 people. Associations included the Association of American Food Processors, founded in 1882, the National Association of Canned Food packers (1890), and the National Canners Association (1907). Marcus and Segal, *Technology in America*, 181; 182.

¹⁷ E. Wagner, *Recipes for the Preserving of Fruit, Vegetables, and Meats*, trans. Charles Salter (London: Scott, Greenwood & Son, 1908), v; A. Hausner, *The Manufacture of Preserved Foods and Sweetmeats*, trans. Arthur Morris and Herbert Robson (London: Scott, Greenwood & Son, 1912), v.

it would be difficult at times to convince rural women to can what many could buy. As early as 1928, conservation specialist Isabelle Thursby articulated this frustration: "Many women have not learned the satisfaction that comes year after year from replenishing the pantry shelves with home-grown products, furnishing the family with a more healthful and varied menu, nor have many women appreciated the opportunities that the great tourist trade offers to the women who make canning an art."¹⁸

To HDAs' business sense, preservation made good *cents*, providing a source of income as well as food. As is true today, attractively packaged jars of tasty jams and jellies or candied fruits sold very well among tourists seeking a taste of Florida to take home with them. Even for staples like vegetables and meats, canning not only saved money for the family, but it earned more than selling fresh food products. In 1933, the state's home demonstration mission statement regarding preservation reported one such example; Holmes County families might fetch two to three cents per pound for cattle on the hoof, but 106 animals killed, cooled and canned sold for thirty-five cents per tin can.¹⁹

Undeterred by women's initial ambivalence, HDAs reinforced their "Live-at-Home" philosophy, and reassured women that the one-time expense of home canning equipment and the labor involved in filling shelves seemed a small price to pay for the return in self-sufficiency, security, pride, accomplishment, skill, even beautification.²⁰ And in this time

¹⁸ Isabelle S. Thursby, *Save the Surplus*, Bulletin 50 (University of Florida, 1928), 6.

¹⁹ *Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service (County Agent and Home Demonstration Work). Its Mission and Accomplishments* (University of Florida, 1933), 39-40.

²⁰ Lu Ann Jones has adroitly captured the sense of pride women felt toward their canning in her retelling of one North Carolina woman's skill in keeping up with preservation without much help, or appreciation, from her children and husband. This woman first struggled to secure everything she needed for canning, like sugar and fruit, largely because she struggled to convince her family that her efforts were worth both time and money, even though both were in short supply. When food was finally on the table, the laboring mother did not receive accolades for her efforts, but more complaints. Despite this, her son recalled, she "swelled with pride as she surveyed her handiwork because she knew that husband and children counted on her 'to put the vittles on the table three times a day.'" Jones, *Mama Learned Us*, 12-13. Friendly competition among home demonstration club women about the

frame, marked by two world wars and a depression, anything a rural family could do to care for itself and meet the demands of nation-wide calls to conservation was of great consequence. All these efforts, however, would have been stunted if the canning was not carried out properly. The more food preservation became about science, the more those trained in the science of food preservation had to offer rural women. By the twentieth century, women interested in more secure and fruitful food preservation had a reliable source of information on which to rely. Through World War II, HDAs benefited from a potent combination of circumstances requiring preservation and their own status as women-in-the-know with daily access to those seeking assistance. Simply put, preservation required expertise, and HDAs were the experts on hand.

Agents' first job was to teach women to can basically and effectively to avert the disappointment, even disaster, of spoiled stores. Though the principles associated with canning had been known at least since Appert developed them in the early nineteenth century, even well into the twentieth century a significant proportion of rural women did not can. Though some did not know how, others believed the practice created foodstuff unfit for consumption—not surprising, since many women canned with unproven methods and equipment, so the result could be tasteless, mushy or, worse, rancid. Canning might have been

amount and quality of their canning is significant on its own as an example of pride, but as Jones' example makes clear, we must not overlook the more mundane, but more important, reasons home demonstration and other women put up jar after jar of food – to feed their families. I cannot but stress once again the invaluable benefit of security against hunger. Preserving any amount was worthwhile, but some women lamented that they could not preserve enough each year to see their families through. Their mixed pride and anxiety reinforces the notion that preservation's first and most significant purpose was to insure against scarcity. Margaret Hagood met women in the 1930s who were disappointed that one factor or another – time, insects, supplies – had limited the quantity they had been able to conserve, so that enough food had not been set aside for the winter. Invariably, however, once complaints had been lodged and disappointments acknowledged, the conversation turned again to pride. Hagood wrote of one woman eager to show off her wares, and her skill. "Many a woman when speaking of canning added, 'and I didn't have a single one to spoil last winter,' or 'I've never lost but two quarts of tomatoes.'" Hagood is quick to point out the significance of such success, given the women's limited resources; these were "impressive records when one considers that only a very few of them were members of home demonstration clubs or had any notions of applied bacteriology." Hagood, *Mothers of the South*, 103-04. Hagood's comments point to the individual strengths of rural women and of home demonstration that, when combined, were formidable.

an art, but it was an imperfect one. HDAs introduced to rural women two things that improved their chances of successful preservation—advice and technology.

It was most important that canners “be painstaking and conscientious,” following all directions exactly and exercising caution in their procedures.²¹ Much canning was relatively simple, but it could be time-consuming; HDAs warned against an “assembly line” method, insisting that only one jar be processed at a time. HDAs regarded and advocated tomatoes as a fruit of innumerable uses, so I will use their basic preservation method as an example here. Tomatoes are washed, dipped in boiling water to aid in removing the skins, and then cored. The raw tomatoes are packed into a clean glass jar, filled to within one-half inch of the top. Salt is added, and the lids are sealed. Then the jars go immediately into a water bath (taking into account sea-level for cooking time), and once processing is complete, they are removed, rapidly cooled, allowed to stand undisturbed for twenty-four hours, then carefully labeled and stored.²² Acid foods, like tomatoes, fruits and pickled beets could be preserved safely using a water bath. However, most vegetables like corn, peas, squash and asparagus, and red meats, poultry, and fish were processed in a pressure cooker to achieve the high temperature necessary for sterilization.

With someone to demonstrate the process step-by-step and the benefits so readily apparent, canning caught on among rural women and agents could begin demonstrating the latest and most efficient way to preserve foods – the pressure canner. These “precious”

²¹ Thursby, “Save the Surplus,” 4.

²² USDA, *Canning in Glass Jars in School and Institutional Kitchens. Fruits and other Acid Foods* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1951).

cookers were precious, indeed, but far more complex in their mechanics than a basic water bath.²³

Aside from their intimidating bells and whistles, pressure cookers were much more expensive, and very often women used them as part of community canning projects at a school or at the home of a club member. The growing popularity of canning among women was matched by the intensification of the connection between food preservation and science. Not only did agents have to know how to can, but they had to be able to explain the process, why certain mistakes caused certain results, and what foods worked well together. “Putting up” increasingly became a part of the growing food technology, an award for which would come to bear Appert’s name. Food preservation became the final and one of the most important elements of this new science.²⁴

HDAs took very seriously the necessity of science in rural life, and never missed an opportunity to remind rural women of the dangers of not being, as State Agent Flavia Gleason put it in 1928, “up to date.” For both family use and for sale, canned goods had to meet certain standards. Gleason opened a bulletin on food preservation with a paraphrase of Emerson: “If a woman make the best loaf of bread, prepare the best bottle of nectar, or put up the best jar of preserves, the world will beat a path to her door, though she live in the center of

²³ In Arthur Raper’s study, tenants who got pressure cookers often mispronounced the name and called them “precious” cookers. Judging by the popularity of canning and its returns, the name is fitting. See Raper, *Tenants of the Almighty* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 237.

²⁴ See, for example, Forbes, “The Rise of Food Technology”, 139-155. The roster of those who have won the Appert medal demonstrates the extent to which science and technology have merged in the quest to create better stores of food. Some of the winners between 1942 and 1960 include those whose findings directly affected the safety of preserved foods, such as Samuel Prescott’s establishment of microbes as the cause of spoilage (Appert had called the processing “fermenting,” much earlier preservers had identified spoilage as the result of “reesting.” This is not unlike health reformers linking disease to “miasmas” before the germ theory). In 1948, Conrad Elvehjem identified trace minerals in foods that had important effects on nutritional quality – including the understanding that Vitamin B-3 could prevent pellagra, a disease linked to malnutrition that crippled many in the rural South. See Szczesniak, “The Nicholas Appert Medalists,” 148-49. Every new finding, in turn, influenced how HDAs taught women to conserve food and reinforced HDAs’ own sense of purpose, in their eyes and in the eyes of those who paid their salaries.

the Everglades.” A rural wife could be a homemaking dynamo, but “in order for a woman to achieve any measure of success . . . she must employ improved methods; she must be painstaking and conscientious; and she must do her work according to scientific principles.”²⁵ In what a modern historian might read as a subtle comment on gender, conservation specialist Isabelle Thursby reassured—challenged—home canners that their work should not be “any less scientifically done or that the home canner should be any less careful . . . than the man who makes canning his profession.”²⁶

Not all women were involved directly in home demonstration club work, not all home demonstration women had adequate canning materials at home, and not all women wanted to can alone, so community canning centers served to provide resources, facilities and camaraderie for women, and men, interested in preserving the surplus. Canning centers boomed during the world wars when there was such a powerful national interest in food conservation. Moreover, the restrictions of food rationing made it imperative that families save whatever they could, since there was little they could have in abundance. During these peak periods of food need, and in less dramatic circumstances, as well, canning centers served

²⁵ Thursby, *Save the Surplus*, 4.

²⁶ Thursby, *Save the Surplus*, 5. There is, too, an issue related to women and this new-fangled canning: the continued relationship between, as Julie Wosk puts it, women and the machine. Rural women in Florida were part of a larger milieu that saw the rise of publications like *The Electrical Handbook for Women* and the journal *The Electrical Age for Women*. The connection was natural, since so much new technology, like pressure cookers, was designed for domestic use. The United States had become increasingly machine-oriented, so that the revitalization of the countryside could not but include the machine. Katherine Jellison has argued effectively that the relationship between farm women and technology was not always what those women had envisioned. In her study of Midwestern Farm Belt women living in the midst of a technological revolution, Jellison notes that farm women endorsed the Progressive Era propaganda that supported farm technology. They believed that adopting technological improvements on the farm would make their already undervalued but laborious *farm* work easier. Midwestern farm women had no intention of shedding their farm producer role, and were critical of the “underlying message” in technology propaganda, which implied that machinery could free women from field work and “instead allow them to conform more closely to the role of full-time ‘homemaker.’” Jensen argues that “most farm women did not see this as a worthwhile goal. They valued their work as farm producers and for reasons of economics and family position wanted to retain that position. In other words, farm women held an alternative vision of modern farm life, one in which their work as farm producers was central.” Jellison, *Entitled to Power*, xx-xxi.

the wider community by assisting women without the necessary articles to can at home. Many women took advantage of canning centers sponsored by home demonstration families, where the home demonstration club members canned foods community members brought to the facility. In areas where good relationships existed between local growers and home demonstration members, canning centers provided a means to remove “quality surplus” from markets and make it readily available to Florida families. In this way, canning centers were an ideal solution for saving the surplus for the greatest number of people.²⁷

After World War II, however, local interest in using canning centers declined, and the facilities deteriorated. Many funded by counties were closed. But within a few years, home demonstration recognized a “felt need” for new canning centers; continued emphasis on food conservation apparently was paying off. A number of new centers were built, or older ones re-opened, for community use. Elizabeth Dickensen, Orange County’s HDA in 1949, reported with pride the imminent grand opening of a new, state-of-the-art canning center. This facility, constructed by county commissioners for about \$15,000, “is a most modern kitchen with new equipment.” When the center officially opened in January 1950, some of the guests on hand were two original Orange County tomato club girls, who demonstrated to the audience canning tomatoes with an “old waterbath canner they used back in 1916.”

Duval’s white HDA, Pearl Lafitte, made a similar report in 1950, lauding the county’s new center where women could get “up-to-date on the latest methods.” The new center was, in fact, a comprehensive demonstration facility, with a kitchen, canning center and an office. Duval clearly had both need and resources for community food preservation facilities; this new center brought the number of canning centers in the county to six.²⁸ Canning centers were an important component of the home demonstration matrix; by making canning

²⁷ Grace Neely, Gardening and Food Conservation AR 1949 (SC-91B-4), 5.

²⁸ Elizabeth Dickensen, Orange County AR 1949 (NARA-33.6-72), 2, 13; Elizabeth Dickensen, Orange County AR 1950 (NARA-33.6-58), 15; Pearl Lafitte, Duval County AR 1950 (NARA-33.6-55), 17-18.

resources accessible to everyone, even those without home demonstration affiliation would be encouraged to save the surplus and employ safe methods. However, canning was not the only preservation game in town. An older, colder preservation technology was making a comeback, this time via electric freezers.

Food preservation was intended to provide security against scarcity; ironically, it was hard times that precipitated another major shift in preservation technology and patterns. Economic collapse, rather than abundance, fostered widespread electrification in rural America. Franklin Roosevelt's pro-active New Deal programs, including the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Rural Electrification Administration (REA), pumped power into homes previously isolated from what Ronald Tobey calls social modernization. How electricity surged into rural homes is less important for our story than the significance attached to electrification. Indeed, many of the ideologies associated with electrification mirrored those HDAs espoused. These same philosophies are also those that infused food preservation technology with extra meaning, namely the confluence of tangible increases in food stores and nutrition and intangible increases in security, order and precision. Roosevelt, Tobey argues, was able to bridge a gap between "Progressive dreams" and the tangible economic crisis of the 1930s with electrical modernization. Roosevelt equated "domestic electrical modernization" with "social modernization," so that "Progressive social modernization meant more than the material improvement of lives. It meant also the moral improvement of life, as a matter of social justice, through technology."²⁹ When the New Deal failed to gain support for TVA-like construction in other regions, the REA emerged in 1935 to conduct electricity across the country, particularly into the countryside. By helping farmers create local electric cooperatives, and imposing regulations to keep prices low for the consumer, the REA significantly increased the rate of rural electrification. The result manifested itself in just two

²⁹ Tobey, *Technology as Freedom*, 95.

decades – only one-fifth of American homes were electrically modern in 1933, by 1955 less than one-fourth of homes were still without power.³⁰ Almost every rural home had gone electric by the 1960s, dramatically altering the ways people lived and worked.³¹

In rural Florida, electrification trends were equally stunning, with the greatest increases following World War II. In 1947, the Florida Cooperative Extension Service created a new post, Farm Electrification Specialist, to help rural families navigate their newly charged environment. As of that year, 50 percent of Florida farms had electricity, most through the REA. The number of electrified farms surged over the next decade, even after taking into account a declining number of farms following a 1950 census redefinition of “farm.” By 1956, almost 91 percent of Florida farms had electricity.³² And by 1956, many formerly rural Floridians were living in suburban or urban areas, so electricity was a familiar resource throughout the state. Though most historians deal with electrification’s impact on a home’s obvious features, like labor-savers for housework, running water, lighting, heating and, in

³⁰ Tobey, *Technology as Freedom*, 208; Alan I. Marcus and Howard P. Segal, *Technology in America*, 19.

³¹ A number of historians have pointed out that, though electricity may have been widely available and pervasive, how rural consumers employed it was entirely a matter of preference. Ultimately, rural consumers created what Ronald Kline calls “individual modernities,” rather than blindly accepting the promises of advertisements and the apparent expectation that all-electric meant all-good. By the mid-1960s, the common wisdom was that rural consumerism was an unstoppable, irresistible force, but that was not the case. Women did not instantly buy into – or buy at all – whatever was “new and improved.” Katherine Jellison emphasizes Midwestern farm women’s clear commitment to their productive roles and their general rejection of the post-war housewife-consumer advertisers promoted. Women selectively chose the technologies they wanted or saw as truly relevant to their needs. Kline cites a telling example: though many farm women were attracted to the new electric ranges, they resisted abandoning their older coal stoves, particularly because coal stoves served as kitchen heaters as well as cooking appliances. So persistent was the reaction to all-electric stoves that manufacturers finally created a hybrid electric-coal stove. See Kline, 278, 197, 205; Jellison, 182.

³² The percentage of electrified farms increased as follows: 1947-50%; 1948-65.4%; 1949-76.5%; 1950-83.2%; 1951-80%; 1952-79.2%; 1953-81.7%; 1954-85.3%; 1955-88%; 1956-90.7%. Aubrey M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1947 (SC-91B-7), 5; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1948 (SC-91B-7), 1; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1949 (SC-91B-1), 1; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1950 (SC-91B-5), 4; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1951 (SC-91B-9), 5; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1952 (SC-91B-13), 5; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1953 (SC-91B-17), 10; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1954 (SC-91B-22), 10; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1955 (SC-91B-28), 12; A. M. Pettis, Farm Electrification AR 1956 (SC-91B-33), 14.

time, cooling, electrification also had a profound effect on our ancient need to preserve food. Though cold storage via cellars, ice boxes and then refrigeration had not been uncommon means of preservation, none of these methods provided long-term storage. Canning had the clear advantage for long-term conservation because once sealed correctly, the vessels were airtight and completely sterile, prohibiting the growth of bacteria and microorganisms. Food could be stored for months rather than days, far longer than in an ice box or even a refrigerator. Electrification created another option, one with canning's ability to store food for very long periods.

Freezers were not created as part of the New Deal's electrification programs, but freezers as a food preservation technology benefited mightily from the government's largesse. As more homes received electricity, more families purchased and used freezers as a means to store food. Other families took advantage of community freezer lockers, just as they had community canning centers. Freezing's advantages were not hard to identify—a freezer held a good deal of food for a good length of time, and processing foods for freezing was less time-consuming and easier than for canning; this was especially true for meat, as evidenced by great leaps in meat preservation. But freezers were not a perfect storage solution—their dependence on electricity made their contents vulnerable to spoilage; all but the largest freezers, which most families could not afford, did not hold the same quantity of food as might be obtained by canning; and freezers cost more than canning equipment. All the same, freezing caught on like wildfire (only colder) among preservation-minded women, so HDAs adapted their conservation programs to meet new interests and needs.

HDAs' firm proclamations that canning was holding its own against freezing belies freezing's rapid takeover. In 1949, food conservation specialist Grace Neely remarked that "We still have and will continue to have many families canning, curing, and storing their home foods. Most families with freezing facilities are still canning some food." On its own,

this statement seems to confirm canning's ongoing supremacy—at least vitality. In context, though, canning was waging a fierce battle. Just before Neely introduced the year's work with canning, she discussed the boom in freezing. The increased access to electricity had propelled an increase in freezer ownership and use among home demonstration club members, particularly white families. About 1,000 families statewide reported owning a freezer, and most of these were "kept loaded to capacity." Some families owned a freezer, but more than 8,500 of them rented a locker in community facilities, as well. Most telling is the statistical increase in freezing; 69 percent of families used freezing for at least part of their conservation. Not only was this percentage substantial, it represented a 59 percent increase over the previous year. Compiling numbers and making observations led Neely and other HDAs to a clear conclusion: "Freezing as a method of food preservation has become very popular." Neely did not overstate freezing's booming popularity. By 1955, the number of home freezers in use by home demonstration families had grown to 10,000 statewide. And those totals do not account for community locker use or for non-club families. Freezing's safe-temperature slogan, "Zero is Best," had taken on new significance.³³

Subtle developments in conservation trends are revealing about freezing's growing popularity and use. For example, in 1950, Florida's 4-H Club Congress representative earned the highest score possible for her frozen food entry. It was the first ever such designation. In

³³ Grace Neely, Gardening and Food Conservation AR 1949 (SC-91B-4), 4; Lena Sturges, Food Conservation AR 1955 (SC-91B-32), 2. Frozen foods had only recently overcome considerable public disgust to become an acceptable, even desirable, source of foodstuffs. Initially, foods were frozen slowly, creating some unfortunate aesthetic maladies that only reinforced the public's suspicion that frozen food could cause food poisoning or was somehow otherwise unfit for consumption. In the case of meat, slow freezing caused two conditions called "burn" and "drip;" burn referred to the perfectly safe but unappealing drying-out that left some portions of the meat shriveled and so hard they were inedible; drip meant the unseemly blood-stained ooze that dripped from thawing meat, caused by cellular rupture while the meat froze. Not only was drip unappetizing in appearance, its cause also destroyed much of the flavor, texture and nutritive content of the meat. Clarence Birdseye's work with quick freezing remedied these problems so that, with persistent advertisement and patience, a wary public came to accept and appreciate frozen foods as an everyday option. Not only did Birdseye develop quick-frozen foods, but he created the freezers necessary to keep foods frozen until the consumer was ready to thaw them. Sue Shephard, *Pickled, Potted and Canned. The Story of Food Preserving* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2000), 297-305.

1955, an out-of-print bulletin on conserving Florida fish was rewritten and reissued, this time focusing on freezing rather than smoking or canning. Also in 1955, frozen foods began appearing as fair exhibits. Santa Rosa County's HDA worked with Escambia County's to set-up an integrated food booth at the Pensacola Interstate Fair, highlighting canning and emphasizing freezing, because they felt it better reflected a Florida family's conservation efforts than would a canning-only booth. In that same year, conservation specialist Lena Sturges noted that there were ten fewer canning centers in Florida, likely closed by their respective counties when usage dropped to such a level that keeping them open was no longer cost-effective. One last example best illustrates the shifting balance of power in conservation. As early as 1949, agents began noticing that as freezing increased, canning *quality* decreased. Some indicators of freezer-use were less subtle. In 1956 Volusia County, when white 4-H girls signed up for their nutrition projects, two chose canning and thirteen chose freezing. In 1950, Florida home demonstration members froze 354,423 pints of fruit and vegetables; in 1958, 1,334,304 pints of fruit and vegetables were frozen, almost the same amount as was canned that year.³⁴

For HDAs who had made a career of advocating and demonstrating canning, what did "Zero is Best" mean for their work? Not so much as we might expect, not because the shift from can to freezer was insignificant, but because HDAs successfully navigated it. And lest we assume that HDAs were solely and consciously responsible for making the freezer craze work for them, it is worth noting that some of what helped HDAs was that the craze was neither uniform nor universal. But let me discuss first what HDAs did consciously do to keep pace. In their measured responses to this newest change in preservation technology, HDAs

³⁴ Grace Neely, Compiled Foods AR 1950 (SC-91B-8), 42, 6; Lena Sturges, Food Conservation AR 1955 (SC-91B-32), 3, 5, 6-7; Ethel Atkinson, Escambia County AR 1955 (NARA-33.6-57), 18; Edna Eby, Volusia County AR 1956 (NARA-33.6-65), 25; Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1958 (SC-91B-51), 2. These totals account for preservation as reported by both black and white home demonstration members.

took several tacks. First, and most obviously, they educated women about freezing effectively and safely. Second, they made freezing widely available in the same way they had for canning, by sponsoring community freezer lockers. Third, they continued to advocate canning and focused especially on improved quality for canned goods. Fourth, they extended education to their own ranks, employing in-service training to bring agents up to speed on changes in, and in some cases the basics of, canning in particular and preservation in general. Finally, HDAs continued to expand their circle of influence, often by simply embracing the urban women who sought extension assistance, to extend preservation philosophies to those not involved in home demonstration. Likewise, HDAs adapted their approach to reflect changes in people's expectations, lifestyles and backgrounds.

Some agent reports seem to indicate a sense of ambivalence towards freezing as it moved into a position of prominence over canning, but since their job was to educate, HDAs did not hesitate to teach women about the best ways to freeze the surplus. True to their extension by the people, for the people philosophy, HDAs usually discussed freezing once their club members broached the subject. As women's interest in and need for information about freezing grew, so did HDAs' attention to the topic. In 1954, conservation specialist Alice Cromartie identified a particular need for information among home demonstration women. Not only was information from HDAs rapidly inundating women, but also from women's magazines, salespeople, commercial demonstrators, and the media. Cromartie believed it was extension's job to help women sort out the hype and supplement it with "more complete directions" or "the latest U.S.D.A. information based on research which gives a safer, surer method of conservation." More so than had been true with canning, freezers were big-ticket items with big brand names attached, part of the 1950s consumerism boom. In other realms, HDAs worked with women to help them become wiser consumers, including clothing selection, appliance purchases, insurance and in grocery stores. The purchase and use of a

freezer was a significant technological shift, and HDAs found they could participate by informing women's decisions.³⁵

The surest way to disseminate information to a wider audience, including those not involved in home demonstration, was to hold community demonstrations and exhibit at fairs. In 1954, a county health unit approached Cromartie about conducting a freezer demonstration. There was no home demonstration program in the county, but the health personnel were interested in elevating its people's nutritional standards. Welcoming the general public, Cromartie conducted this and four other such demonstrations, with a large turn-out and "gratifying results." Equally important, given home demonstration's commitment to providing hot lunches in every school, conservation specialist Lena Sturges conducted a demonstration on packaging foods for freezing and freezer management at a meeting of 500 school lunch supervisors.³⁶

In addition to providing educational support and consumer guidance, HDAs found they could make themselves useful by opening freezing preservation to the general public and those home demonstration members without freezers of their own, just as home demonstration had done with canning. To that end, HDAs helped sponsor freezer lockers, the counterpart to canning centers. HDAs worked cooperatively with locker plant operators to eliminate problems and establish home demonstration workers as a willing source of information and assistance to locker users. By 1955, more than 6,000 home demonstration families used community locker plants to store surplus foods, many in addition to the freezers they owned.³⁷ While HDAs actively pursued educating women about freezing as a viable preservation

³⁵ Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1949 (SC-91B-26), 2. HDAs also tried to police food hype for nutritional purposes; one of their major goals was to help women overcome "food faddism."

³⁶ Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1954 (SC-91B-26), 2, 5; Lena Sturges, Food Conservation AR 1955 (SC-91B-32), 9.

³⁷ Grace Neely, Gardening and Food Conservation AR 1949 (SC-91B-4), 17; Lena Sturges, Food Conservation AR 1955 (SC-91B-32), 2.

technique, they also continued to advocate canning as an equally viable, and in many ways, preferable preservation option. However, their approach shifted.

Since a family's food supply did not necessarily depend solely on canning, after World War II HDAs redoubled their canning advocacy in terms of quality rather than quantity. As canning declined among women, the quality of their canned goods tended to decline, as well; fair exhibits made this painfully clear. Leon County's white HDA Nellie Daughtry, new to the county, remarked in 1949 that she could not help but notice that canning quality was suffering, even among the best packs women entered in fairs. She acknowledged that more women were freezing rather than canning, but "judging from the quality of foods exhibited at the annual fair, there is much to be done in teaching good home canning standards." Daughtry astutely identified the cause of this deterioration. "It has been assumed that since the beginning of Home Demonstration Work was canning," she mused, "that the homemakers have grown tired of this subject and know all they need to know." This assumption was false, she argued for "the young homemakers need to be taught good methods and the older homemakers need to keep informed on changing methods of home conservation."³⁸

Gadsen's Negro HDA, Gladys Wilkins, noticed a different problem with the same results. In 1949 she, too, remarked about the declining quality of home canned foods, but named overenthusiastic canning as the culprit. "Many homemakers conserve large quantities of food, but it has been found that the quality of the canning is not quite up to par," she wrote. To remedy this, Wilkins determined to devote extra attention to the correct procedures for "filling jars, removing air bubbles, and proper use of the pressure canner." Quality canning took time and patience, and HDAs earlier had warned against working too fast, trading precision for output.³⁹

³⁸ Nellie Daughtry, Leon County AR 1949 (NARA-33.6-70), 19.

³⁹ Grace Neely, Gardening and Food Conservation AR 1949 (SC-91B-4), 13.

Poor canning quality was not necessarily the result of inattention caused by starry-eyed devotion to freezing, or imprecise abundance caused by canning zeal; sometimes, canning did not come out its best because women were using imperfect but comfortable methods out of habit, rather than ignorance. Conservation specialist Alice Cromartie noted that “change in practices come slowly, but progress is being made with the rural and non-farm families toward using improved methods for canning. Leon County HDA Nellie Mills provided a perfect example. As late as 1950, the county’s top white canning demonstrator was still preserving vegetables and meats using a water bath canner. Finally, though, after three years of intensive education, cajoling and persuasion, Mills was able to convince this woman to adopt safer methods, exchanging her “poor practices for correct ones.”⁴⁰ By refocusing their attention on canning quality, HDAs reaffirmed their own expertise and their place in the food preservation dynamic. When women strayed from the basics, HDAs were on hand to help reinforce them. One agent described her approach to refining preservation among her members in 1954, “No fancy packs, but more attention given to degree of maturity, syrup, water levels in jars, types of jars, lids, etc.”⁴¹ Ironically, it was not always home demonstration club members in need of refresher courses, but home demonstration agents.

As the amount of commercially-available food expanded, attention to food preservation contracted, all across the broad spectrum of homemaking educators. The result was that, if HDAs were going to justify their jobs based on the sort of assistance I just discussed, it was necessary that they knew what they were doing. And some did not. Particularly among very green and very experienced agents, both basic and new technologies related to food preservation were a mystery. New agents were ill-prepared by their formal home economics training and older agents were not keeping pace with the rapid changes in

⁴⁰ Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1952 (SC-91B-16), 6.

⁴¹ Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1954 (SC-91B-26), 9.

preservation. So, one of the ways that home demonstration responded to evolving preservation technology was to train, retrain and train again its agents. Following World War II, it became increasingly obvious that too many agents had too little training to be effective food preservation advocates and educators. Not everyone was heading to Piggly-Wiggly stores, so in-service training was critical if home demonstration was to remain relevant to the many families interested in and dependent upon home conservation.

Some in-service training was neither unusual nor particularly indicative of gaps in expertise. Since club leaders and project chairwomen were responsible for passing along their own expertise to their fellow members, they often met with HDAs and specialists to learn of new methods and refine old ones. HDAs themselves attended conferences and seminars to learn what was new in the field and exchange ideas and experiences. And the specialist regularly received bulletins and papers detailing whatever new research scientists at the Experiment Station and in the USDA were conducting.⁴²

What was less encouraging and more indicative of the assumption that home conservation was losing ground was an untimely deficiency in educator training for conservation. Just as agents and other educators seemed less capable of assisting women with preservation, these women's interest in it suddenly surged. The coincidence of these two conditions gave in-service training a new urgency. In 1954, Alice Cromartie applauded HDAs' willingness to conduct canning demonstrations in public schools' home economics classes. But why would a home economics teacher call upon a home demonstration agent to teach something so basic to the economics of homemaking? Home economics teachers, Cromartie said, were "not equipped to teach conservation and have come to depend upon the home demonstration agent for up-to-date methods." Discouraging facts indeed, but Cromartie

⁴² For examples of these regular activities, see Grace Neely, Gardening and Food Conservation AR 1949 (SC-91B-4), 14; Grace Neely, Compiled Foods AR 1950 (SC-91B-8), 40, 41; Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1953 (SC-91B-21), 12.

soon was making a similar comment about HDAs. In 1958, extension staff in nine counties requested workshops in food preservation because “the training given Home Economics students in college today includes very little subject-matter or experience with the various aspects of food conservation. Therefore, those who go into Extension Service work lack security in this area.” In addition to ill-prepared new agents, some experienced agents transferred to Florida and had to become familiarized with foods and practices to which many were unaccustomed. Finally, “there are constantly coming from Food Processing and Research Laboratories new and improved methods in food conservation in which agents need to be trained.” Cromartie voiced the same concern about unprepared agents in 1959, but at least could report that efforts were being made to correct the deficiency. “Lecture, demonstration, and laboratory methods, all were employed to help the Agents gain security as the county leaders in food conservation.” Unfortunately, this sort of agent training had only been possible on “a very limited scale” thus far.⁴³ It was vital that as agents urged their expanding client base to get and stay up-to-date in food preservation, they do the same.

What some agents lacked in training they made up for in reputation – an increasing number of families outside the home demonstration circle sought home demonstration assistance on a variety of topics, including food preservation. By embracing these newcomers, HDAs found a whole new audience. HDAs increasingly reported requests from urban and suburban women for assistance. When it became obvious that this was a trend rather than an isolated phenomenon, home demonstration agents made the non-club public a regular part of their work. As Leon County agent Irie Mae Clark put it, “Home Demonstration work is no longer thought of as being restricted solely to the rural areas. More urban families

⁴³ Alice Cromartie, Food Preservation AR 1954 (SC-91B-26), 5; Alice Cromartie, Food Preservation AR 1958 (Sc-91B-51), 3-4; Alice Cromartie, Food Preservation AR 1959 (SC-91B-57), 1,12.

have grasped the “live-at-home” atmosphere.”⁴⁴ With Tallahassee at its core, Leon County was quite urban. In some counties, the urban population was even more pronounced. Such was the case in Duval County, where Pearl Lafitte and Ethel Powell found themselves serving a largely urban clientele of both white and black families. Lafitte had a clear grasp of the importance these non-traditional clients had for home demonstration; the size of the urban population and its disconnect from any farm program made it “very necessary that a cordial public relation be maintained at all times.” Lafitte likely saw in urban families the next wave of club members, especially as the traditional, rural population that once had formed the backbone of home demonstration was markedly diminished in counties like Duval. When the urban folk, many new to Florida, needed information on soils, plants, lawns, shrubbery, trees and vegetables, “they turn to the Extension Service.”⁴⁵ Rather than ignoring this clear opportunity to adapt home demonstration to new clientele and so carry on the work, HDAs wisely welcomed the chance to make themselves useful to a whole new generation of women and families.

Moving into this new era of extension work, HDAs availed themselves of both new patrons and new approaches to them. When it came to food preservation, the increasing variety of Floridians proved incentive to keep the work fresh. Alice Cromartie remarked on this growing diversity in 1950, citing families of comfortable means on large farms, families with limited incomes on small acreage, urban families farming outlying regions, migrant laborers and winter tourists as among those considered in developing the food conservation program.⁴⁶ We will see with nutrition that agents had to adjust their advice to fit what was possible and practical. For example, most families in urban areas could not keep livestock,

⁴⁴ Irie Mae Clark, Leon County AR 1951 (NARA-33.6-53), 7.

⁴⁵ Pearl Lafitte, Duval County AR 1950 (NARA-33.6-55), 13-14.

⁴⁶ Alice Cromartie, Food Preservation AR 1950 (SC-91B-8), 1-2.

limiting their access to home-based dairy and poultry, and many families had only a small space for vegetable gardens, limiting the amount they could produce for preservation purposes. And with more and more women working outside their homes, many did not have adequate time to devote to large-scale food preservation any longer. So, HDAs made a point of emphasizing not only home preservation, but wise consumption, as well, depending on local needs and circumstances.

Demonstration planners also recognized that expectations and lifestyles were changing, so that HDAs' continued relevance depended on talking to people about what mattered to them, not what Seaman Knapp had once said, or the outlook of rural women in 1925, or the structure of the family in 1940. In 1958, Alice Cromartie reported her staff's intention to revise the canning and freezing programs for the purpose of "devising Food Conservation Projects which better fit the needs of present day living." Most telling of HDAs' sensitivity to shifting circumstances is the late-1950s trend of redefining demonstration work itself based on women's education. From its inception, home demonstration had been just that, demonstration work. The method demonstration and result demonstration were designed to show, not tell, women how, and how well, a procedure worked, not explain why it worked. Though pure demonstrations did not fall out of favor, agents did change their approach to working with women. In 1959, Alice Cromartie explained, "Keeping pace with the rising educational level of Florida families the Nutritionists have for the past couple of years de-emphasized the how-to . . . and have emphasized instead more of the why's of food and nutrition as a science." Cromartie believed that this shift was a "colorful step into the science of nutrition instead of the traditional, demonstrated-dish way of teaching."⁴⁷ So, what is so important about this need-change-response story in food preservation?

⁴⁷ Alice Cromartie, Food Preservation AR 1958 (SC-91B-51), 3-4; Alice Cromartie, Food Preservation AR 1959 (SC-91B-57), 9-10.

Some of the impact linked to food conservation technology is not surprising. It is perfectly appropriate to expect and to find that home demonstration work with food preservation increased food stores, variety and nutrition for many families across Florida. As I have emphasized throughout the dissertation, numbers are not the most important measure of home demonstration success, failure or importance. Even if relatively few families took to heart home demonstration recommendations regarding food preservation, nutrition and security are not quantifiable indicators of whether or not home demonstration was “good” or “bad.” Moreover, even if very few families participated in and benefited from home demonstration-inspired food preservation, numbers alone cannot explain how such an apparently ineffective organization managed to carry on for the past ninety years. Even now, Family and Consumer Sciences includes as part of its expanded and updated program education about and work with food conservation. The reason is the same it was thirty or fifty or seventy years ago—saving food never really goes out of fashion, even as the means to do so changes.⁴⁸ Work with food conservation meets a fundamental need. But the average Florida family, even by 1960, could simply procure their food from a grocer or supermarket, so why bother with either the effort or the expense of preserving foods at home, even going to the extra trouble to raise some of that food at home, too? The answers tell us a lot about why

⁴⁸ The nature of each county’s FCS work differs based on, as always, funding and local interests. For example, Hillsborough County’s entire extension program remains a sort of powerhouse, and its food work represents the continuing commitment to core principles adapted to meet changing needs and circumstances. For instance, Hillsborough’s FCS program includes both a general Food and Nutrition section and an Expanded Food and Nutrition section, the latter devoted entirely to the needs of low-income families. Both sections deal with stretching the food dollar and with maximizing nutrition, and the FCS staff has incorporated a great deal of information on food preservation, including canning for fruits, vegetables and meats, freezing foods and dehydrating foods. For examples, see food preservation instructions and recipes at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Canning_Food and general Food, Nutrition and Health at <http://hillsboroughfcs.ifas.ufl.edu/Nutrition/FNH%20Main%20page.html>.

home demonstration survived as it did. Let me start with one answer from the mid-1950s, when home demonstration was first getting started in Franklin County.⁴⁹

Franklin County in 1953, when its first agricultural and home demonstration agents arrived, was similar to what most Florida counties had been four decades earlier—dilapidated homes, poor health, women’s time short and disorganized. The county sits in a nook of the Florida panhandle, with the Appalachicola National Forest in its north, comprising most of the land in the county, and the Appalachicola Bay and the Gulf of Mexico to its south. Not surprisingly, most residents pursued fishing, and by extension hunting- and fishing-based tourism, as a livelihood. Franklin’s coastal soil was predominantly what all Florida soil was (and is)—sand. Agriculture in the county was limited to some honey production, a little truck farming and a few livestock. Though many people lived in rural areas, very few lived in actual farm homes. In 1953, about 5,000 people lived in the county; more than 3,000 of them lived in Appalachicola, the county seat. Most women worked outside the home, particularly in oyster packing plants. The work was difficult, dangerous and not handsomely rewarded. Educational levels county-wide were quite low, though its first HDA, Miriam Edwards, was quick to point out that there were some well-educated folk throughout, particularly among the women living within Appalachicola. Franklin dinner tables were heavy on seafood and light on vegetables or fruits.⁵⁰

Conditions simply were not yet favorable for lush home gardens, pantries stocked with home-preserved foods and tables set with a varied, nutritious diet based on the “basic seven.” Like other HDAs in other counties earlier, Franklin HDAs had to begin at the

⁴⁹ Sumter County, where home demonstration work began in 1949, experienced much the same sort of basic introduction into extension work, beginning with food conservation with girls, whom the agent expected would pass along improved methods to their mothers. Moreover, the girls began by canning tomatoes, just as they had in the “tomato clubs” that predated home demonstration. See Neely, *Food Conservation* 1949, 20, 21.

⁵⁰ Miriam Edwards, Franklin County AR 1953 (NARA 33.6 – 56). Subsequent agents repeat many of Edwards’ observations, but her brief initial report aptly describes the conditions in the county.

beginning, familiarizing residents with what home demonstration was and how an HDA could help them, assessing local needs and conditions, and then shaping programs to meet local interests. For example, each of the first three agents identified nutrition as the key need in the county, but all recognized that women there were most interested in clothing work, to make clothing for their children and save the money they might have spent having to buy garments, so home demonstration began with clothing.

When attention could be devoted to foods, HDAs helped women expand their preparations for their seafood staples, and tried to help them start home gardens and teach them basic preservation techniques.⁵¹ In 1954, Miriam Edwards noted that food preservation was “almost nil in many families in the counties.” Freezers for many were too expensive, so agents focused on canning. There was considerable room for home demonstration assistance, because many women did do some canning, but by “back-breaking methods and not always getting a good-quality product.” Another Franklin agent, Ann Jeter, described the efforts of a Mrs. Walker, who had been canning for some time, but in “an old iron wash pot which was very discouraging as it required hours of hard labor.” Edwards believed that conservation could be increased and enhanced throughout the county if only the women knew and employed “the new practices and methods of freezing and canning which save time, energy and storage space yet produce a good quality product.” To that end, Edwards invited conservation specialist Alice Cromartie to give two day-long meetings on preservation. The meetings were well-attended, primarily by ladies whom Edwards suspected were “more

⁵¹ Ann Pierce Jeter, Franklin County AR 1957 (NARA 33.6 – 56), 9. Jeter’s description of women’s gardens reflects the starting-from-scratch nature of home demonstration work in the county, and its unique situation. For example, the women were rightly concerned that the soil would not support any sort of garden, but Jeter demonstrated the use of compost to enrich the soil, and to compensate for the lack of animal fertilizer in the fishing-oriented county.

curious perhaps than interested at the moment.” She was confident, however, that the women went away impressed—and encouraged to try conserving foods.⁵²

It was especially important that the HDAs teach women to preserve food themselves, because even wise consumption had limited value given Franklin’s grocery situation. Unlike a much larger market, like Tampa, Orlando or Jacksonville, Franklin County did not attract a variety of stores, so that even by the late 1950s, there were no “large competitive super markets.” The result was not encouraging for nutritional improvement. First, the cost of food was quite high because there was so little locally grown. Second, when fresh produce was available, the quantity was limited and the quality was poor.⁵³ So it was that Franklin HDAs in the late 1950s were emphasizing core principles, combined with the newest techniques to carry them out, in a county whose resources differed dramatically from many of those in which home demonstration had been operating for decades. No HDA worth her salt was going to shrug off home preservation in Franklin County just because so many other Florida counties had access to supermarkets and large truck farms.

It also is crucial to remember that even in counties where home demonstration was well-established, all home demonstration club members did not have the same experience with preservation technologies. Agents had to shape the conservation phase of their work to what their clients most needed, wherever they were in the preservation process. Freezing’s apparent takeover of canning is only a valid assessment if we ignore unique local realities. For example, in 1956 Volusia County, both white and Negro home demonstration work was entrenched. However, the black families with whom HDA Ida Pemberton worked needed far more attention paid to canning than to freezing, even if it was all the rage elsewhere. Few

⁵² Miriam Edwards, Franklin County 1954 AR (NARA 33.6 – 57), 9; Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation 1958 AR (SC-91B-51), 4.

⁵³ Barbara Daniels, Franklin County AR 1955 (NARA 33.6 – 57), 9. Every agent made this same complaint, and so seemed to quickly decide that home production and preservation was the key nutrition and security solution.

families owned a freezer, though interest was growing, so Pemberton did not conduct any demonstrations for the adult members specifically about freezing. Among 4-H girls, Pemberton found an ideal opportunity to reinforce the overall preservation message regardless of resources. One girl's family owned a freezer and wanted to share information about the tool with her fellow 4-Hers. Pemberton helped her lead a demonstration on preparing and freezing grapefruit. Though everyone was interested, Pemberton followed up the demonstration with one on other ways the girls could use or preserve grapefruit, making sure they understood that it was not necessary to have a freezer, or access to one, to preserve foods for the family.⁵⁴ Pemberton's skillful navigation of the changing technology waters served the greatest good—keeping the future homemakers up-to-date *and* empowering them to make their homes better with what they had.

Access to freezing was a little different in Hillsborough County, where only a few black families owned a freezer, but shared their use with friends and neighbors. With ready access to freezers, agent Sudella Ford's clubwomen demonstrated such interest in freezing that she thought it wise to begin holding demonstrations on the subject in 1955. By 1956, "definite information" was circulating about freezing, and "more women are freezing foods than ever before," so much so that Ford could tabulate the total amount of frozen foods produced by her members.⁵⁵ Unlike the very slow move into freezing in Volusia County or the sudden swell in Hillsborough County, freezing among Alachua County home demonstration members, white and black, was well-entrenched. Agent Leontine Williams simply discussed freezing as she

⁵⁴ Ida Pemberton, Volusia County AR 1956 (NARA-33.6-65), 7; 15. I would expect that, as finances allowed, Volusia women would employ freezers more often because they were easier to use than pressure cookers. Only about half of Pemberton's clubwomen knew how to use the pressure cooker; indeed, some of the 4-H girls were a bit afraid to use one. Processing foods for freezing was not only less tiresome, but less intimidating.

⁵⁵ Sudella Ford, Hillsborough County AR 1953 (NARA-33.6-57), 11; Sudella Ford, Hillsborough County AR 1955 (NARA-33.6-61), 12; Sudella Ford, Hillsborough County AR 1956 (NARA-33.6-61), 11-12.

discussed canning, as something her members did regularly and with success. She is not specific about freezer ownership, only noting that “many of the rural and urban families are using their home freezers to a great advantage.” Nor does she explain how women feel about freezers, only that “canning, freezing, storing and curing are the . . . methods used for conserving food by homemakers in the county.”⁵⁶

So, there were definite trends among women active in home demonstration throughout Florida. Freezer use and ownership were rapidly expanding, often to the detriment of the quantity and quality of canned goods but to the improvement of conservation in general and meat storage in particular. Within the entire home demonstration membership, black women owned and used freezers much less than their white counterparts; only about half of the counties employing a black HDA were actively involved in freezing. But among black women, the level of interest in and experience with freezing varied significantly by county. Yes, freezing was growing in popularity state-wide and many women had shifted their efforts to embrace the cool new preservation alternative. But each agent was sensitive to what her community needed and could do, and responded appropriately. Local situations demanded that home demonstration continue to customize reform, rather than base it solely on broad trends.

A second answer to the “why not Piggly Wiggly?” question is based on the weather. Florida families found that preservation in general was a good choice for increasing their security and lowering food costs, and that freezers were a convenient and relatively easy way to store food. But freezers’ dependence on electrical power made them, and their users, vulnerable in the event of a power failure. And in Florida, power failures have been common, especially in hurricane season. In this case, HDAs were wise to continue teaching women not just to conserve food, but to continue including canning in their regimen. But as we saw

⁵⁶ Leontine Williams, Alachua County AR 1957 (NARA-33.6-55), 5; Leontine Williams, Alachua County AR 1953 (NARA-33.6-55), 2.

earlier, canning was falling by the wayside, many new home extension workers were poorly trained in its methods, or not trained at all, home economics teachers were virtually clueless about canning, and home economics programs at universities had practically left off teaching it. The assumption that freezers and refrigerators could meet all of a family's preservation needs proved faulty, and just as home demonstration and home economics looked about to neglect canning, women called them back to it.

Women reminded the reformers of their own relevance. In 1958, conservation specialist Alice Cromartie noted, with some pleasure, that calls to the state and county offices for canning assistance had increased dramatically after "catastrophic freezes" devastated crops and tourism, creating a "general economic slump." Food preservation overall, including freezing, had increased, but Cromartie was quick to point out that this "all-time high for frozen fruits and vegetables" was "only slightly higher than the number reported stored by canning." Duval County Nellie Mills reported a similar canning swell, "one of the busiest canning seasons in June, July and August . . . since the war years," after unusually large spring and summer crops. And South Hillsborough HDA Virginia Hill reported putting special emphasis on freezing vegetables, but club women had shown an increased interest in canning.⁵⁷

Canned or frozen, home-preserved foods did not lose their place as a fundamental of secure life, even when it appeared that HDAs expected conservation to continue its decline. Cromartie, this time sounding a bit chagrined, remarked in her 1958 report that the "shift of emphasis this year to more food conservation demonstrates the greater reliance of the people upon the basic skills of family living. Perhaps it indicates that as Nutritionists work with agents in formulating plans to help families . . . , more help should be given in the proper role of conservation."⁵⁸ Dade County's HDA Eunice Grady reported in 1951 that food

⁵⁷ Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1958 (SC-91B-51), 1-2.

⁵⁸ Cromartie, 1958, 3.

conservation work had not even been included on the home demonstration calendar, but that she had received many calls for preservation assistance, especially from the “non-member public.”⁵⁹ Frankly, it seems that HDAs were caught off guard by the surge in food preservation interest in general and in canning in particular. A quick response kept HDAs afloat. Even so, that revivalist spirit was ignited almost fifty years ago; how does that explain why FCS programs still include preservation, and still include canning?

Even in our technology-enthralled world, the power still goes out occasionally, and we realize that technology comes in many forms. A case in point comes from a very recent, and very trying, summer here in Florida. Beset by no fewer than four devastating hurricanes in 2004, Floridians went without power to some degree or another for much of the summer, and some folks for much longer than that. Amidst calls for assistance to power companies, FEMA and other emergency services, some calls went out to the traditional go-to service – the local extension office. Here in North Central Florida, a significant number of women called on their local FCS agent for advice regarding canning. Yes, canning – water baths, pressure cookers, the whole package. So many calls came in, in fact, that Alachua and Levy County FCS agents held a canning clinic to meet the demand. Why the sudden surge in canning interest? Because while cleaning out freezers full of spoiled food ““A lot of us remembered . . . that there were some good reasons to prefer canning over freezing,”” as Alachua agent Brenda Williams put it. Not everyone attending the clinics was there just to thwart nature’s havoc—some also were interested in preserving her bounty and, Williams believes, ““this part of our heritage.””

Proof that this seemingly quaint technology (a local newspaper reporter referred to canning as “ancient”) remains pertinent, and that its teachers remain relevant, lies in some of the reasons clinic attendees showed up at all. One woman wanted to try canning, something

⁵⁹ Eunice Grady, Dade County AR 1951 (NARA-33.6-51), 12.

she had shared with her grandmother as a child, to keep on hand foods that did not aggravate her son's allergies. Another woman was interested in refreshing her canning skills because methods she had learned once did not seem to work any longer. Attendees learned, for example, that the popular and oft-canned tomato had to be canned a little differently. Modern consumers demand a less acidic fruit, and growers have responded by creating tomato varieties with less bite, compromising the acidity that once had made tomatoes ideal for simple water bath canning.⁶⁰ It turns out that nature, science and technology were combining once again to draw learners to extension teachers. Home demonstration maintained relevance in food preservation work because conditions across Florida never were uniform, and because in Florida, the weather can outwit just about any technology.

Of course, after my immediate excited reaction to the news that canning was not a dead art, or science, I asked the same question—why not just buy canned foods at the grocery store and set them aside in anticipation of storms? Asked like someone who has never canned, obviously. My question had violated the principle of food conservation—save the surplus. Yes, canned vegetables purchased from a Publix or a Wal-Mart Supercenter would suffice to meet food needs in the event of a power outage. But anything I also had in the freezer would spoil, and that would waste food. Canning surplus foods would conserve the food in any event. But what about people who do not have a freezer full of food to lose? They ought to be just as satisfied with commercially canned products, and most of us are. But some people still can, or have begun to can, even though it no longer is technically cost effective, it is a steamy, long job and the equipment takes up room in already cramped homes. Despite the apparent disadvantages, canning yet has meaning, even for modern consumers—control over ingredients (how many insect legs does the FDA allow in a can of green beans?) not being the

⁶⁰ *Gainesville Sun*, 11 May 2005.

least of canning's appeal. Those intangible qualities bring us back to this chapter's central theme, the relationship between home demonstration and food conservation technology.

Aside from continued relevance for HDAs and the literal accumulation of foodstores among Florida families, I see five implications in the evolution of food technology, particularly that segment where food moved out of the can and into the freezer. Some changes brought losses in independence, nutrition and aesthetics. But change also encouraged democratization and increased women's control over their resources. First, the shift from preserving primarily by canning to freezing represents a certain loss of independence. As we saw above, dependence on an electrical device put people seeking food security at the mercy of the weather. The whole point of food preservation was to save the plenty in anticipation of the famine—to fix the seasons. Having to replace spoiled stores with store-bought food defeats the purpose of Live-at-Home economy, and for those without funds to shop for food, spoiled stores could spell the same lapse in security as not preserving at all. HDAs encouraged women to continue canning along with their freezing, but as Escambia agent Ethel Atkinson bluntly remarked in 1951, "After women have experienced the results of home freezing both for their home freezers and their rented locker space they do not return to canning except products that are best for canning."⁶¹

Related to this problem is a loss in nutrition. In addition to warding off lean times, HDAs advocated food preservation so that a variety of foods could be available and consumed at all times. Vitamins were not supposed to be a treat just for the winter truck season. In the early 1950s, Alice Cromartie began to report concern, based on "scientific research," about a rising deficiency in vitamins A and C, as well as calcium, among Floridians. Milk consumption had been an ongoing battle, especially among adults, but the decline in certain vitamins coincided with the rise in freezer use—and the new ease of preserving meats—and

⁶¹ Ethel Atkinson, Escambia County AR 1951 (NARA-33.6-52), 14.

the decreased number of home gardens as families moved out of rural areas. These forces combined to decrease fruit and vegetable consumption, and create a resulting loss in certain vitamins. HDAs responded by encouraging more fruit use and conservation, prompting a slight increase in canning between 1953 and 1954.⁶²

Vitamin deficiencies also are linked to an aesthetic loss in the transition from can to freezer. In glass jars, canned goods could be quite striking. But the aesthetic appeal of canned goods, the sort of distinction fair entrants still covet, also meant increased nutrition. HDAs were well-aware of vitamins and minerals and that fruits and vegetables were critical in the daily diet. Dazzling color photographs of canned foods demonstrated both the aesthetic and health benefits of a varied store of foods.

Today, scientists, growers, gardeners and retailers are lauding the benefits of plates full of color. The darker and more colorful vegetables are, the more antioxidants they contain. One food in particular, one that did grow and does grow well in Florida, has caught the attention of those interested in the connection between color and health. Blueberries' rich hue, what the Wild Blueberry Association of North America has labeled the "Power of Blue," may carry the power to battle cancer, dementia, and heart disease. Beyond the blueberry, consumers should seek and expect to find more familiar foods in unfamiliar (but actually old) varieties. For example, the everyday (baked) white potato has great nutritional value, but when those potatoes are orange, red or purple, they pack a punch of "up to four times the antioxidants zeaxanthin and lutein as white potatoes." HDAs likely were not bandying about terms like lutein, antioxidants, flavonoids and phytochemicals, but they may have made the diets and lives of those they served healthier than even the latest home economics curriculum

⁶² Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1953 (SC-91B-21), 3; Alice Cromartie, Food Conservation AR 1954 (SC-91B-26), 1, 4. The prime reason canning increased slightly was that families found that their freezers could not hold enough food, so canning became a supplement.

could have predicted, so decreased fruit and vegetable consumption had significant repercussions.⁶³

Evolving preservation technology did not mean all disappointing results, however. Increased access to knowledge, equipment and foods is indicative of one of the sub-themes for the whole dissertation, the democratization of rural reform among women. There was a time when Americans of fewer means railed against canned goods as the stuff of the leisured class, available only to those who could afford to do without. In the early nineteenth century, some Americans decried the apparent sacrifice of democratic principles and the integrity of the yeomanry for indulgence in European-style pretensions of class and privilege. One of the aristocratic leanings that caught critics' attention was the growing market for canned foods. Remember that Thomas Kensett had patented American canning in tin in 1825. Though the unassuming containers did not raise any suspicions, and the technology did not cause concern, the contents seemed decidedly undemocratic. Kensett and other canners began by preserving New England seafood, such as lobster and oysters, and selling them to consumers in the nation's interior. Such foods were expensive, and critics complained that only the wealthy could buy them, and that the wealthy did so just because they could. As Alan Marcus and Howard Segal argue, the canners had every right to sell their goods to a seemingly elite market—the problem was that such a market even existed. What respectable American yeoman, whom the majority of Americans were supposed to be, had any need of or desire for canned lobster?⁶⁴

Given this initial concern about the undemocratic nature of canned foods, it is interesting that home demonstration's efforts actually helped democratize food consumption

⁶³For more on colorful food and health, see Kathryn Barry, "Colorful Potatoes Offer Nutrition, Variety," *Agricultural Research* 49 (October 2001): 6; "Think Health, Think Color – Think Blue," *Frozen Food Digest* 17 (April-May 2001): 20; the number of articles available in the last few years on blueberries is many, published in everything from *Time* to *Prepared Foods* to *Psychology Today*.

⁶⁴ Marcus and Segal, *Technology in America*, 64.

and nutritional health. Nothing screamed poverty like pellagra's jaundiced, lethargic victims; fruits and vegetables available year-round made a world of difference in the health of families utilizing their own or a community's food preservation resources. Food has always been linked with class, and preservation was no different. Even early preservation techniques were not used by everyone because not everyone had the time or ingredients, such as sugar or vinegar, to preserve significant quantities of food. Over time, preservation recipes came to be aimed at middle-class homemakers, women with both the time and need to take advantage of them.

Home demonstration, though, associated food preservation most often with basics—nutrition and economy—rather than luxuries. Even making jellies and other treats was often for marketing, as a way to increase cash income. It is true that, at any given time, the majority of women who otherwise were candidates for home demonstration programs were not participating, and so may not have benefited from its message and expertise. And not every person interested in food preservation could afford a pressure cooker or a freezer. That does not mean, however, that only a select few enjoyed the benefits conservation offered. Before community canning centers operated, women shared use of canning equipment, owned by either a HDA or one of the families. And both canning centers and community freezer lockers served thousands of people. It is particularly telling that at a time when canning was declining among Florida families, the agents who continued to advocate preservation most heartily were those working with lower income families, who had less cash to spend on store-bought foods.

Finally, we come to the heart of the matter. Food preservation is about control, about power. Home demonstration gave women the tools not just to cope, but to be comfortable. In 1936, while Florida was deep in its Depression, Holmes County agent Bettie Caudle declared proudly, "there is no use to worry about getting hungry in Holmes County." Pantries there

were lined with more than 27,000 quarts of food, reportedly put up that year alone.⁶⁵

Whatever other layers made up the canning story, the most important was the most obvious – a full larder, full stomachs, healthy bodies, all year long. Conservation specialist Grace Neely argued that home conservation, by capturing foods’ best flavor and peak vitamin content, gave rural families the greatest possible control over food quantity, quality and overall healthfulness.⁶⁶ Just beneath this layer of tangible well-being was that of pride in skill and friendly rivalry in the amount canned, as well as the attractiveness of walls of colorful jars. Below all these layers, were deeper, finer ones, shaped by time-worn innovations in preservation technology and Progressive philosophies of efficiency, health, expertise and progress. Naturally, all these ideals fell open to interpretation, and agents freely customized them to meet the needs and preferences of the women with whom they worked. This segment of the food preservation story, marked by the relationship between HDAs, families, technology and science, was a dual success story, neither rejected nor imposed.

Caudle’s declaration, 2004’s Florida canning resurrection, the evolution from burial to pots to bottles, the photo below—all tell us why food preservation has never quite lost its appeal, and why HDAs, by staying involved, alert and “up-to-date,” never lost their appeal. The key is connectivity. Even in the 1950s, the world was growing less and less organic. Machines, hardscape and stainless steel defined daily life’s boundaries. More Florida families lived in urban or suburban areas, less connected to anything farm-like than they ever had been before. On the surface, it seems comforting to be able to purchase what we need from the local supermarket, perhaps occasionally stopping in to a farmer’s market for some fresher produce and a “country life” moment. Yet rural and urban families’ continuing interest in food preservation tells us that laying by meant saving not only the surplus, but saving the links

⁶⁵ Bettie Caudle, Holmes County 1936 AR (FSU-29), 7.

⁶⁶ Neely, 1949, 2.

between people and their production, consumption and preservation. Knowing intimately where food came from – more importantly, where it was going to come from – increased women’s sense of control over their families’ lives, their health, their resources. Preserving food decreased dependence on outside sources of stability, and reduced vulnerability to sudden change or crisis. As late as 1959, conservation specialist Bonnie McDonald remarked that women’s interest in canning and preservation, though diminished from its heyday, was nevertheless an “assurance that family food production and conservation at home is still worthwhile and possible.”⁶⁷

The same reason people continued then and continue now to can (or dry or freeze or salt) is the same reason food preservation is worth studying at all. Wendell Berry, ever critical of the machine in the garden, cautions against the increasing tendency to barricade ourselves from the natural world, whether from fear, convenience or repulsion. Canning, especially for those women involved in raising their food, delayed the process of becoming, as Berry puts it, “exiled from biological reality.”⁶⁸

The technology of food preservation, though it posed certain challenges to home demonstration’s long relationship with rural women, also demonstrates the importance of details. HDAs made a living, and secured their futures, by knowing how food preservation worked, even as the mechanisms and science rapidly evolved. The education they passed on to women empowered them by keeping them in the loop. For any of us still asking “so what?”

⁶⁷ Bonnie McDonald, Food Conservation AR 1959 (SC-91B-57), 16.

⁶⁸ Wendell Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating,” in *Our Sustainable Table*, ed. Robert Clark (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 127. Lynette Hunter also explores our connection to what we eat and why we continue to preserve food, since “we do not technically need to do so for survival or nutrition, and there are many cheerful commercially-produced bottles around.” She speculates that perhaps we are drawn to preservation for nostalgia, pride or precise knowledge of what we are eating (remember the woman whose son had food allergies?). Like Berry, Hunter sees something else at work, “Preserving brings the general domestic cook closer to the subtleties of cooking than our mundane cooking normally allows.” See Lynette Hunter, “Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Trends in Food Preserving: Frugality, Nutrition or Luxury,” “*Waste Not, Want Not.*” *Food Preservation from Early Times to the Present Day*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 153.

let me repeat the core issue where food preservation is concerned. The fundamental principle of preservation, like its technology, may seem outdated, even inconceivable, today—for thousands of years, creating and maintaining a store of safe, nutritious food was critical for warding off literal starvation and diseases associated with malnutrition. The advent of grocery stores and drive-thrus did not automatically end food concerns, for not everyone could afford to rely on these conveniences.

Food preservation, however it was done, has only recently become a choice, even a hobby—for most of its history, it was a keystone of survival. Often the poorest could not preserve food using the best, easiest or safest methods, but they preserved nevertheless. Proof that what some have regarded as a luxury, was in fact a necessity is in Margaret Hagood's experience studying white tenant farm women. Hagood's portrait of one woman, divorced with five children, no domestic help and a full work load in excess of her housekeeping duties, demonstrates the central importance of canning. This woman, though she worked all day with the owner's tobacco crop and often stayed up at night to maintain the fire in the curing barn, also spent time at night canning food for her family.⁶⁹ So, whatever faults home demonstration had, whatever shortcomings its HDAs brought to their work, their consistent efforts to assist women and families to save the surplus were invaluable and imperative.

In the same way, the links between education, power and control proved vital for health reform. Theories of rural sanctity and urban domesticity held no sway against the biological realities of disease, malnutrition and contamination. Large-scale health operations like the State Board of Health were effective, but not accessible or embedded the way HDAs were. Urban renewal and city clean-up efforts did not extend to any significant degree into the countryside. Local health facilities were scattered, understaffed and unable to provide the critical combination of advocacy, information and physical assistance that extension staff

⁶⁹ Hagood, *Mothers of the South*, 57.

made available every day. Like food preservation, health reform at its core was not a luxury issue. Our nostalgia for outhouses as quaint reminders of a simpler time does not begin to grasp how very critical the design and use of sanitary facilities really was. So much of what was wrong with Southern rural health was the result of ignorance—knowledge bred power, and power bred health. HDAs once again earned their keep by dealing in details to educate and so empower women to take control of their families' and their own beleaguered health.

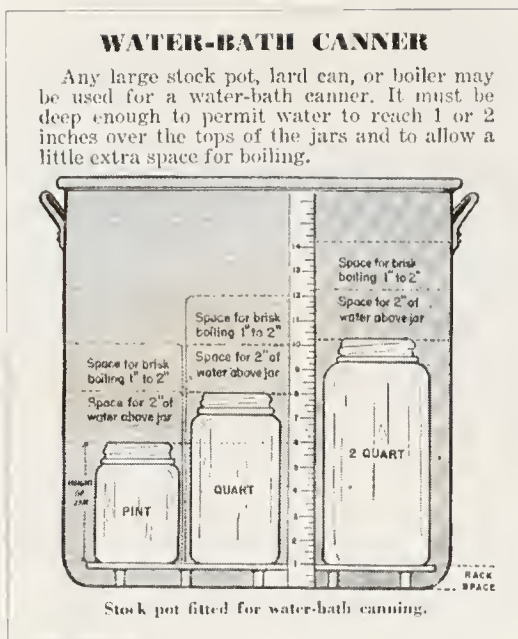


Figure 4-2. A cut-away view of a water bath. Source: Bertha F. Olsen, *Canning in Glass Jars in School and Institutional Kitchens: Fruits and Other Acids*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Handbook No.11 (January 1951).

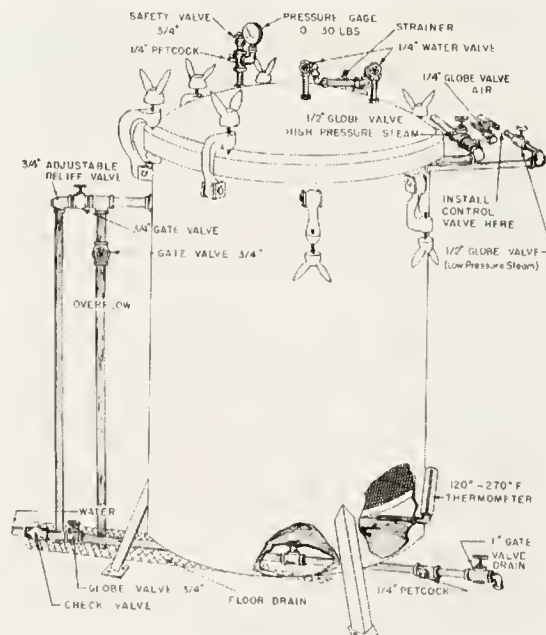


Figure 4-3. A pressure cooker; a retort for glass jars and tin containers of all sizes. Source: *Canning in Glass Jars in Community Canning Centers*. United States Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Handbook No. 44 (July 1952).



Figure 4-4. A home demonstration kitchen in Hillsborough County, 1918. Note the clear attention to order. Source: Florida Cooperative Extension Service AR 1918 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1919), 86.



Figure 4-5. A community canning center, a cross between a home operation and a commercial plant. Such centers provided space, equipment and camaraderie for Florida canners. Source: *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1944.*

County's New Canning Kitchen



THE HOME-LIKE, \$1,000 Orange County
canning kitchen, shown here at 141 W.
Katy Ave. The freepress cement block
building with its bright walls and modern
equipment will make the canning a safe
center for housewives and farmers, a most
improving factor in the lives of the
Orange County people.

Figure 4-6. This cement block structure replaced an "old barn with sawed-off barrels instead of sinks" as the community canning center for Orange County. The center was designed so that anyone, regardless of experience, could move from station to station canning their foods. Users only had to make an appointment to use the center, capable of accommodating fifteen to twenty-five people at a time, bring their own foods to can, and pay a small fee to cover the cost of the tins, provided by the center. Source: Orange County Annual Report, 1950 (NARA-33.6-55), 26, 28.



Figure 4-7. Mrs. W. B. Edwards in Lloyd, Florida, with her new home freezer. Source: photographer unknown, 1957. Florida Photographic Collection, General Collection



Figure 4-8. Home demonstration exhibit booth at the North Florida Fair in Tallahassee, 1955. Source: Red (Benjamin L.) Kerce, "Home demonstration club booth on freezing." Florida Photographic Collection, Red Kerce Collection.



Figure 4-9. This TVA photo, taken between 1933 and 1945, shows a woman accessing her freezer locker in North Carolina. Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, [LC-USW33-015601-ZC DLC].

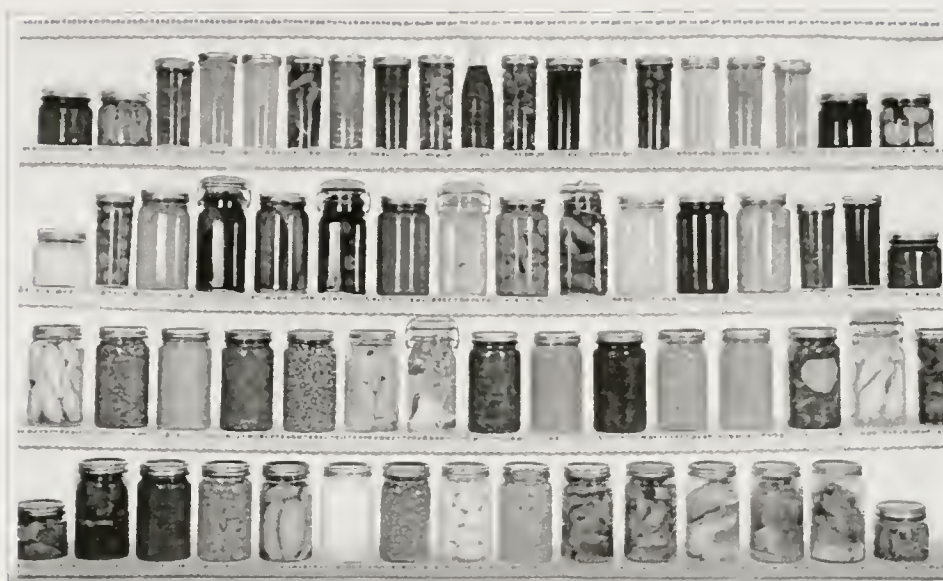


Figure 4-10. A healthy display of canned goods. Source: *Canning in Florida* (Tallahassee: Florida Department of Agriculture, 1942).⁷⁰

⁷⁰Though this photo is not in color, its ingredients offer some clues to its original vibrancy. Key to this display (moving left to right and top to bottom): 1. pear mince meat 2. guavas 3. orange marmalade 4. grapefruit preserves 5. lemon marmalade 6. sweet cucumber 7. cabbage pickle 8. peach butter 9. bread and butter pickles 10. ketchup 11. mixed pickles 12. plum jam 13. lemon and orange marmalade 14. strawberries 15. grapefruit 16. orange jelly 17. grapefruit marmalade 18. peach jam 19. pickled peaches 20. corn 21. sour cucumber pickles 22. pear butter 23. citron preserves 24. dill pickles 25. beets 26. apple butter 27. pears 28. pickled pears 29. pickles 30. pears 31. blueberries 32. egg plant 33. pepper relish 34. kumquat preserves 35. chili relish 36. squash 37. snap beans 38. sauerkraut 39. tomatoes 40. English peas 41. turnip roots 42. succotash 43. spinach 44. pumpkin 45. pear conserve 46. field peas 47. carrots 48. turnip greens 49. squash 50. mixed pickles 51. pork roast 52. beef steak 53. tomato soup 54. carrots 55. sweet potato 56. lard (ugh!) 57. baked beans 58. Irish potato 59. butter beans 60. beef steak 61. pickled pigs feet 62. beef heart 63. beef roast 64. spare ribs 65. giblets. *Canning in Florida*, 79.



Figure 4-11. This visual, “The output of a Florida home kitchen,” demonstrates the ideal result of home demonstration's Live-at-Home campaign: a home-produced, well-stocked, well-planned, healthy larder. Source: *Canning in Florida* (Tallahassee: Florida Department of Agriculture, 1942).

CHAPTER 5
“THE UNIMPROVED TOILET IS ALL TOO PREVALENT”:
HOME DEMONSTRATION, ITS PARTNERS, AND RURAL SANITATION

“The unimproved toilet is all too prevalent.” Home Improvement specialist Virginia Moore made this assessment of rural Floridians’ sanitary facilities in 1934, as part of the Federal Farm Housing Survey.¹ Her brief comment cuts to the essence of home demonstration’s work in sanitary health reform: the dangers were endemic and the device for reform was nothing more spectacular than a sanitary toilet. Moreover, HDAs’ contribution to sanitation work was unassuming. Whereas programs such as nutrition, food preservation and clothing had their own specialists and operated as discrete phases of work, sanitation work appeared under a variety of rubrics, including health, home improvement and rural engineering.² How did that impact home demonstration’s own longevity? Did HDAs neglect sanitation work, perhaps in favor of more appealing phases, like nutrition? I do not believe so. But neither did home demonstration make sanitation its highest priority. Though HDAs regarded sanitation reforms as important, they did not necessarily champion them as something uniquely related to home demonstration.

This story is as much about the environment of home demonstration’s sanitation work as the work itself. That period of intensive work from before Smith-Lever until 1940 and reformers’ mission to ameliorate and hopefully eradicate hookworm and malaria is the core of this chapter. Sanitation work is not important in this study because it was something HDAs

¹ Virginia P. Moore, “Federal Farm Housing Survey Summary Report, Florida, Part IV” (SC-21-7), 5.

² Indeed, so often did sanitation show up under Home Improvement that Virginia Moore’s Home Improvement specialist reports make up the bulk of primary home demonstration sources for this chapter.

attacked with Herculean efforts and succeeded where countless others had failed. Quite the opposite, home demonstration's work within sanitation reform was significant because HDAs were *not* the key players—they were *a* key player, participating in a collaborative campaign. Their contribution was not winning the war against affliction, but providing unique weapons to improve the fight.

Ironically, HDAs involved themselves in crucial reforms that tackled concrete, immediate dangers to rural families' health, but because they did not glamorize these reforms, historians have not paid them much attention. I suspect that much of the historical criticism home demonstration has drawn has been motivated by what home demonstration itself devoted the most overt attention to, those apparently superficial, aesthetic reforms that critics have taken as evidence of a fluffy organization imposing outsiders' fluffy standards on independent and less-than-fluffy women. And unlike food preservation, where HDAs were continually at the forefront, in sanitation work HDAs often were in the background, or somewhere in the midst of a jumble of reformers. But these reforms were quite serious; I am emphasizing them here because if home demonstration did not make its own case for its role in sanitation work, then I will make it for them.

Though I am not inclined to draw a hard line about aesthetic or cultural reforms that home demonstration adopted or endorsed, I am equally adamant about its importance in health reforms. The global significance of sanitary health serves as a grim reminder that not all reforms have been frivolous. Today, 1.3 billion people on this planet do not have access to clean drinking water; by 2010, that number will reach 2.5 billion. As of 2002, 2.6 billion people, more than forty percent of the world's population, lacked access to improved sanitation. In the next twenty-four hours, 4,000 people, most of them children under the age

of five, will die of a preventable water-borne disease.³ Historians can argue endlessly about the cultural, racial, gender and socio-economic ramifications of rural women hauling water versus accessing it from a spout in the kitchen, but a clean, consistent water supply and appropriate, safe sanitary facilities are not just matters of convenience. If being free of hookworm was a white, middle-class, urban standard, so be it.

Though HDAs' work with health reform did help ensure agents' professional survival, the ability to endure was not the result of some supernatural ability—HDAs could not leap tall privies in a single bound. Their health work mattered because HDAs were working cooperatively within a matrix of concerned reformers attempting to bring under control a number of pervasive and debilitating health deficiencies. Health reform was not only about the economic future of the South, the significance of race and gender, or the impact of the state in modern America; it was about being able to prevent the lethargy, illness and debilitation caused by a gut full of worms.

Longevity takes on new significance when we consider the debilitating diseases and conditions home demonstration workers attempted to rectify. Disease was nothing new in the South, and it persisted in some form or other well after hookworm and malaria had been brought under control. But sanitation represented the most urgent, most tangible problems facing rural Southerners for much of the last century. Health conditions in the South, including Florida, revealed a disturbing reality—the rural South was much more akin to a developing nation than to the ultra-modern, industrial powerhouse New South boosters had envisioned. Hookworm and malaria, as well as typhoid, tuberculosis and scabies, were deeply

³ An irony, when we think about our commitment to spotless cars and “pride-of-the-neighborhood” lawns. Such disheartening statistics on water shortages, use and conditions can be found at www.worldwaterday.org and the World Health Organization's (WHO) site, “Water, sanitation and hygiene links to health,” www.who.int/water_sanitation_health, with figures updated to November 2004. My quick statistical check came from Carole Rubin, *How to Get Your Lawn Off Grass. A North American Guide to Turning Off the Water Tap and Going Native* (British Columbia, Canada: Harbour Publishing, 2002), 11, 13.

embedded in the South's people, with little regard for race or age, and barely less for income. Inadequate sanitary facilities were the norm, not a perversion specific to the poor. Indeed, sanitary problems plagued Americans throughout the country because science and understanding took so long to overcome common practices, and infrastructures simply did not exist on a scale adequate to meet the needs of booming populations, or of rural communities on the waysides of modernization.

Particularly challenging was that health practices in general and rural access to improved resources were rudimentary at best. In 1931, Leon County's black HDA, Alice Poole, lamented the state of her county's homestead health. "It is regretted that as important as Health, Home and Sanitation is, it should be so sadly neglected in the rural districts," she wrote. "Proper toilets, water supply and living conditions in and around the homes are serious problems."⁴ Though Progressive reformers had devoted considerable attention to health and sanitation, much of their efforts had been in urban areas, and even there conditions were hardly optimum. Ideally, rural Americans would have known not to walk barefoot near dilapidated privies (or in the absence of privies), or ignore pools of standing water. But the reality was that rural folks suffered from an unfortunate combination of diminished resources, inadequate knowledge, and dangerous but comfortable habits. Many concerned reformers unfairly blamed rural dwellers outright for what ailed them, citing moral, cultural or racial deviance (or all three) as the supposed cause of compromised health.

If HDAs shared this view, they did not make it public. Perhaps they understood better, dealing with families on a regular basis in their homes and communities, that the plagues on rural health were often very serious and their remedies, while not elusive, were problematic. Ironically, reform *had* made an impact in rural communities, but not always for

⁴ Alice W. Poole, Leon AR 1931 (SL-21), 7.

people. Progressive farmers vaccinated their livestock against hog cholera and chickenpox but the farmers' children were exposed with alarming frequency to debilitating, and usually preventable, disease.

Though poor health was pervasive across the South, the irony of Florida health was more pronounced. To many from outside and within the state, Florida was an earthly paradise, an ever-blooming, vibrant, fertile Eden. Much of the state was beautiful, and outsiders loved the "balmy" climate. Indeed, in 1889, James Davidson composed a guidebook of Florida "for tourists and settlers" in which he described the prevalence of malaria (but discounted the theory that it was transmitted by Spanish moss), but also elaborated upon the healthful climate and its "sanitary qualities." Davidson cites the praise of a Dr. Kensworthy on Florida climatic effect on "broken health." From his observations around the world and in Florida, Kensworthy reported, "I have been forced to notice the infrequency of chronic disease and broken health in Florida." Though Kensworthy favored the climate's relaxing effect, the tropical heat, rain and humidity that mark Florida's weather patterns also made it a perfect environment for malaria and hookworm. The rate of malaria, for example, was six times that of the national average in 1939.⁵

Despite the gravity of the problem and their potential impact upon it, HDAs spent little time calling attention to their work, but its value is clear in the way others described the

⁵James Woods Davidson, *The Florida of To-day: A Guide for Tourists and Settlers* (New York: Appleton, 1889), 52-55, 57; Federal Writers' Project, *The WPA Guide to Florida* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1939), 107. Florida's prevalence for disease, however, may have prompted the state's research into hookworm to move in a direction different from the rest of the nation. Hiram Byrd noted in 1910 that the previous decade had been devoted to hookworm research among scientists, physicians and sociologists, mostly studies based on a "medico-biological" analysis of the disease. But, Byrd explained, "two places in the world . . . Porto Rico and Florida," had been studying hookworm from a sociological perspective, studying the life of the host rather than the parasite. Whether Florida and Puerto Rico's focus made any difference or not is unknown—hookworm was still prevalent in both places. At least in 1910, Florida was unique in another way. Where it would be a hardship for a family to pay for hookworm treatment, the State Board of Health would cover the cost, "the only place in the world where that is done," said Byrd. See Hiram Byrd, "Hookworm Disease: A Handbook of Information for All Who Are Interested" (Florida State Archives, Record Group 810, Series 905, Box 1),

challenges of sanitizing rural life. In 1910, the State Board of Health's Dr. Hiram Byrd addressed the possible, and the probable, means of controlling hookworm in Florida.⁶ The challenge, he said, was making the possible probable. "The eradication of hookworms on paper is one thing; in the field it is another," Byrd cautioned. In theory, eradication could be done completely and quite easily: prevent soil pollution, treat all the sufferers, have everyone wear shoes. In reality, "these theoretical considerations," however sound, could not account for everything necessary to win the hookworm war. Beyond theory, "our success must finally rest upon the co-operation of the people at large; for who can prevent soil pollution unless the people will it to be so? Who can treat the sufferers unless they choose to be treated? Who can force shoes upon the children, if they and their parents do not elect that they shall wear them?" Byrd expected that the most convincing reformers would be those who could approach sufferers with compassion, intelligence and sensitivity, who could deal with the public on the most local terms.⁷

Byrd shrewdly anticipated the nature of education required to secure the public's cooperation, "the most important part of the crusade." "The great work of the day," he wrote, is winning others to the cause, spreading the ferment . . . until every part has been affected." But how people were won depended on who they were. Working top down, "we are dealing with a more and more incredulous public as we descend, and we must accordingly produce stronger and stronger evidence before we will even be believed." HDAs were perfectly suited to this sort of education because producing proof was their specialty. Byrd argued that, though "literature and lectures" had been effective among the "higher social and intellectual

⁶The State Board of Health was created in 1889 to combat a yellow-fever epidemic, primarily through quarantines. Federal Writers' Project, *The WPA Guide to Florida*, 105.

⁷Byrd, 49-50, 55. Byrd was careful to advise reformers that it was imperative for them to respect the privacy of anyone they examined, especially to avoid singling anyone out of a group and effectively announcing to the community that someone had hookworm. Byrd, 54.

strata,” hookworm campaigns had made their way to the lower strata, “in which personal contact and the treatment of the individual must be the dominant features.” Moreover, this was “the stratum that demands not pictures of the worms, but the worms themselves; not the story of the children that have been relieved, but children in their own community—children that they have known from birth—must be relieved and serve as object lessons.” Byrd understood the enormity of the challenge, and called for community-wide action, “for the amelioration of the hookworm trouble is too large for any one man; too large for any institution . . . ; too large for anything short of a united effort on the part of the whole people in the infected territory.”⁸ Home demonstration was in its infancy when Byrd called for this type of education, but within a short time home demonstration would become official and HDAs would develop the skills and access necessary to do just what Byrd predicted.

Unlike my approach in other chapters, here I will refer more frequently to non-extension reformers because sanitation work was collaborative, and to other Southern examples because, in matters of health, Florida was very Southern – buggy, muggy, undeveloped, and unsanitary. But the principal reason for not dealing with Florida exclusively in matters of health is that health reforms were the result of multi-state and multi-organization efforts. Health reform brought together a diverse range of organizations and initiatives to tackle health problems, from grassroots efforts like National Negro Health Week to bureaucratic bodies like the Florida State Board of Health to organizations somewhere in between, like home demonstration. I argued before that home demonstration endured, in part, because it was willing and able to cooperate with other agencies. Nowhere is that more important than in health reform. In fact, each of the strengths I can identify for home demonstration is in play in sanitation—cooperation, realism, negotiation, adaptability,

⁸ Byrd, 52, 51.

education, mobilization, feminization, democratization. Of course, those big themes are the historian's perspective, but what motivated HDAs operating in real time to talk about privies and flies?

A first explanation for HDAs' concern for rural health was altruism. The most potent example comes from B. T. Pompey, a black HDA in Alabama. In her 1933 report, she cried "My people are dying from a want of knowledge."⁹ Her words cut to the heart of the matter for many HDAs—rural people were not just statistics or laborers, they were the agents' people, their neighbors and friends. Especially for black agents, watching already disadvantaged families struggling under the additional burden of ill health was disheartening. How could these people ever get ahead when they could not even get through the day? A second cause for HDAs' worry was ideological. Especially early on, home demonstration was still tied very much to the Country Life Movement's ideal of a revitalized countryside that actually fit the picture of bucolic vibrancy so often painted of it. It was difficult to find strapping young lads and comely maidens in areas wracked by hookworm. Third, HDAs after World War I were caught up in an international health fervor that wed notions of modern health and national progress to rural hygiene. Fourth, buttressing these altruistic and ideological concerns were practical ones, namely the economic fallout of widespread disease among rural Southerners. A 1925 Georgia Board of Health bulletin on malaria warned,

"The serious economic effect of malaria . . . cannot be too greatly emphasized. Wherever malaria exists farm labor is inefficient, causing crops to be below normal. At the very time of year when farm labor is most needed, a great deal of this labor is incapacitated as a result of attacks from malaria."

⁹ Pompey quoted in Mary Kyes Stevens, "'By Our Surroundings Ye Shall Know Us': Alabama Black Home Demonstration Agents and the Complexities of Moral and Social Uplift, 1928-1936," (M. A. thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 1999), 5.

The point was simple—"the cost of eradication of mosquitoes is inconsequential in comparison with the cost of malaria."¹⁰

For HDAs, all these individual motivations added up to one comprehensive goal. Florida's Home Improvement specialist Virginia Moore summed it up neatly in her own 1933 report: rural home improvement could create homes better than "some slum in a city." Of course, in the official 1933 Extension Service report written for public consumption, Moore altered the tone of her goals: "To have rural homes that are clean, orderly, convenient and attractive . . . leads to the development of happy, healthy, progressive and dependable rural citizens."¹¹ Unfortunately, it is just that kind of statement that has led historians to believe that home demonstration was involved in little more than a rural American public relations

¹⁰ "Mosquitoes and Malarial Control," Engineering Bulletin No. 2, Georgia State Board of Health (May 1925), 4.

¹¹ Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1933 (SL-23), 4; Virginia P. Moore, "Home Improvement," *Florida Cooperative Extension Service AR 1932* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1933), 87. Race further complicated the motives for sanitation reform. HDAs did not express any racial theories of disease, though they did understand the impact of race on disease prevalence and suffering. In 1909, Thomas Stedman promoted a theory of racial contamination as cause for the hookworm epidemic, arguing that black Africans brought the disease to America and polluted the soil upon which they, and unsuspecting whites, walked. Racial deviance, he said, made blacks un-American because they "served 'as breeders of the worm and sowers of its seeds, to the lasting injury of their white neighbors.'" Stedman's views were not unique. In Jacksonville, the State Board of Health's City Health Officer, Charles E. Terry, argued that blacks jeopardized whites' health. The "race danger" was the result of interaction between white employers and black employees. Though Terry's attitude is repugnant to a modern reader, his fears on behalf of white residents actually created some good for black workers. The solution to the "present threat," he wrote, was widespread employment of black nurses and "carrying into the homes and institutions of these people . . . the teachings we have too long reserved for ourselves." Terry's hopes were not high that health reforms would make much progress among "this alien race," but argued nevertheless that "any reduction of morbidity . . . among them . . . will be accompanied, in some degree, by a lessening of our own infections." See "State Board of Health Subject Files—Jacksonville—excerpts from early Board of Health reports ca. 1916" (Florida State Archives, Record Group 810, S. 899, Box 4, Folder 42). HDAs did not express the same sorts of "race infection" theories Terry espoused. As a group, HDAs were concerned for the state of the nation, but they did not characterize the ill as deviant, and they did not blame one group for the maladies they all shared. Though historians dealing with the South are inclined to think of race in terms of black and white, Florida's population was more diverse than that, a fact not lost on some hookworm researchers. Hiram Byrd did see race as a factor in how hookworm spread, and though he tended to blame black Floridians for hampering progress in eradicating it, he saw the Seminoles as victims of hookworm themselves, "the last of the great races of humanity to have had it thrust upon [them]." Byrd, 40, and on racial impediments to progress against hookworm, see Byrd, 38, 52.

campaign. Moore may not have represented the gravity of the situation, or the tangible good home demonstration might do, but the reality was every bit as stark as the rhetoric was ambiguous.¹²

There is little sense in going on talking about hookworm and malaria without first elaborating on what they are, how they are transmitted, and how they are cured and prevented. Before 1900, most Americans had never heard of hookworm, and those who knew of it had little understanding of its siege upon the rural South. Today, too, I suspect that few Americans know exactly what hookworm is or how it affects the body. Fortunately, the vast majority of us will never endure an infestation. The same is not true for the rest of the world. Hookworm is still common world-wide, in any warm, moist climate, and the parasite's survival and spread depends upon an unsanitary environment. The disease has been known, if not explicitly, since antiquity, and today as much as twenty-five percent of the world's population may be infected at any one time.¹³ The parasite comes in a variety of forms, and though most infect animals, two seriously infect humans.¹⁴ One of these is endemic to the

¹² This chapter began as a conference paper / course assignment. A peer read and reviewed the paper, and was utterly dismayed by the extent of detail I had provided about disease, privy construction, etc. But details are necessary because they save lives, by explaining *why* a change is necessary. Furthermore, details are real. Idealized notions of bucolic felicity are ambiguous—worms are not. Sanitizing sanitation serves no purpose worthy of real change, and I will not do that here. Faint of heart beware.

¹³ A classic treatment on hookworm, *Clinical Parasitology*, describes hookworm as second only to malaria and malnutrition in “production of human misery and economic loss.” It is worth noting that worldwide, and once in Florida, the three maladies often co-exist in a single sufferer. See D. W. T. Crompton and L. S. Stephenson, “Hookworm Infection, Nutritional Status and Productivity,” in *Hookworm Disease: Current Status and New Directions*, eds. G. A. Schad and K. S. Warren (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 1990), 231.

¹⁴ It is possible to contract an animal parasite by coming into contact with soil infected by animal waste, but such an infection is localized and treated with relative ease. See the children's book by Gail Jarrow, *Hookworms* (New York and London: KidHaven Press, 2004), 20-21.

American southeast, *Necator americanus*—"American killer."¹⁵ An infestation, though not necessarily fatal, leads to serious medical consequences. There is no cure, per se, for hookworm, though researchers continue to work toward a vaccine. Even if an infected person is treated and the infestation purged, re-infection is as close as the next barefoot contact with infected soil—prevention is the only real cure.

Both the parasite and the disease are so seemingly innocuous that Southerners initially made little connection between them. Eggs incubate in the soil, hatch out as larvae when the soil becomes damp, and in about six weeks are capable of infecting a human. Even at that point, the parasite is nearly invisible to the naked eye. Infection can occur wherever skin is exposed to contaminated soil, but usually happens on the soles of the feet while walking on infected soil. The parasite bores into the skin, causing a small rash at the entry site, what Southerners called "ground itch" or "dew itch." Before any other symptoms appear, the rash usually has faded, and doctors assumed that hookworm and ground itch were separate conditions. In fact, once inside the body, the hookworm larvae travel through the bloodstream to the heart and then into the lungs. The resulting irritation promotes coughing, so that the host brings the larvae into the throat, swallows them and passes them into the small intestine.

¹⁵ Alan I. Marcus makes an interesting argument related to hookworm and national identity. When the disease and its method of transmittal were finally identified in 1905, physicians took the parasite's Southeastern orientation as a sign that Southerners were un-American. Doctors had long assumed the disease was a transplant from southern Europe, brought to the United States and spread by foreigners. But in 1900, an army physician in Puerto Rico found that a significant portion of the island's people also were infected. That discovery was followed by similar ones in the West Indies and the Philippines. Aware now that hookworm was endemic to the Western Hemisphere, physicians decided that hookworm was evidence of what they had long suspected—that poor whites, among whom hookworm was most common, were un-American. The medical community explained hookworm's prevalence among the Southern rural poor as evidence of deviance. A lack of cleanliness, notably dirt-eating, seemed to doctors the primary root of hookworm susceptibility—a theory that, though inaccurate, transferred "deviance" from social commentary to medical intervention. Once they made the connection between "ground itch" and hookworm, medical researchers were poised to advocate effective ways to prevent infestation. See Alan I. Marcus, "Physicians Open a Can of Worms. American Nationality and Hookworm in the United States, 1893-1909," *American Studies* 30 (1989): 103-121; Byrd, "Hookworm Disease," 23-24.

There, they latch onto the intestinal wall and feed on blood. Maturity instigates a battery of symptoms, including abdominal pain, decreased or unusual appetite, diarrhea, weight loss and finally progressively worsening anemia. While in the intestine, a female lays thousands of eggs every day. Eggs are passed from the host during elimination, which of course re-contaminates the soil and the cycle begins anew. Adults may live and reproduce within a human intestine for as long as fourteen years, making lifelong infection a very real possibility. The only way to end an infestation is by testing stool for eggs, then administering a purgative to rid the body of the worms.

Because hookworms continually suck blood, anemia is the most debilitating symptom of the disease. HDAs were particularly concerned for children, in whom hookworm can cause heart problems and delayed mental, physical and sexual development. If the disease is caught and eradicated early on, it is likely that a child eventually will catch up to healthy peers' mental and physical status; if left untreated, hookworm's effects prove irreversible. Hookworm is certainly fatal in infants, and can prove so in children and adults, as well, because their weakened system cannot fight secondary infections.

Hookworm became so widespread that its physical manifestations came to be regarded as the key factors in identifying the rural Southerner: yellowish skin, listlessness, and the classic "pot belly" and "angel's wings," jutting shoulder blades caused by emaciation and slumping. Most obvious was the unusually small stature of hookworm victims, particularly evident in children who had been infected most of their lives. Case files of hookworm sufferers, taken by the Florida Board of Health, reveal the host of symptoms, often evident in entire families. Maggie Bryant, age three, of Polk County, suffered from "marked anemia, pot belly and dry hair;" her older brothers Langley, age twelve, and Albert, age sixteen, demonstrated the long-term effects of living with hookworm. Albert, especially, was in dire

condition when doctors examined him, and he forms the picture of the quintessential rural Southerner wracked by illness: having suffered “ground itch every year for twelve years,” Albert suffered from “anemia, undersized, pot belly, dry hair, pain in abdomen on pressure, eats dirt, rags, horse feed, etc.”¹⁶ It was just this sort of debilitation that HDAs worked with their partners to correct, and hopefully, prevent.

Sometimes water quality was less dangerous than water quantity. Standing water is an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, and mosquitoes spell malaria. Unlike hookworm, malaria was, and still is, recognized as a serious disease, but is so commonplace that many might be inclined to pass it off as a tropical disease dangerous only to unwary adventurers and suffering missionaries. Indeed, in the early twentieth-century South, medical personnel averted their attention from malaria to devote time to controlling other diseases that appeared and swelled in apparent plagues, like hookworm and pellagra. However, malaria’s fatal potential requires consistent serious examination, treatment and prevention. Though the disease was essentially eradicated from Florida in 1948, and from the United States by the mid-1950s, malaria is still a global killer, driving home the point that the health work in which home demonstration was involved was not relegated to rural oddities of a bygone day. As of November 2004, 1.3 million people die of malaria annually, ninety percent of whom are, again, children under five. Ironically, improvement contributes to malaria outbreaks, for irrigation, dams and the like add to exposed, still water source, and town-building, logging and mining disrupt tropical forests and leave behind ditched earth without an ecosystem to absorb water.¹⁷ In rural Florida, malaria occurred most commonly where water was left standing in

¹⁶ “State Board of Health – Hookworm Case Files” (Florida State Archives, Record Group 894, S. 905, Box 1). Though these symptoms were common, they were not universal, especially in mild cases.

¹⁷ Donovan Webster, “Malaria Kills One Child Every 30 Seconds,” *Smithsonian* 31 (September 2000): 36. Webster notes two other factors contributing to resurgence in malaria worldwide: its resistance to drugs and a lack of safe, effective, affordable insecticides. DDT, though widely used to eradicate

drainage ditches, puddled in yards, or trapped in neglected receptacles. One estimate of malaria deaths in Florida, Alabama and Georgia between 1922 and 1931 reveals more than 2,800 deaths in Florida, almost 2,700 in Alabama and about 4,400 in Georgia. Though the number of deaths declined over that period, mortality spiked in each state in 1928 and 1929, killing between 500 and 700 people each year. More white than black Southerners succumbed to malaria, but the rate of death per 100,000 people was often double or triple for African-Americans, usually because they suffered even greater exposure to malarial conditions and had even less access to medical care than their white neighbors.¹⁸

Because malaria spreads by mosquitoes that first have bitten an infected person, the more people in an area with malaria, the faster it spreads. Four species of parasites can cause malaria, but it is transmitted only by the *Anopheles* mosquito. Once bitten by an infected mosquito, a person hosts the malarial parasite in the liver, where they multiply rapidly and spread into the bloodstream. Once inside red blood cells, the parasites multiply even more quickly and when the cells erupt, symptoms begin to appear, usually ten days to four weeks from the time of infection. Symptoms at first can be flu-like, including head and body aches,

malaria in the United States, has since been banned in many areas because its environmental cost has been too high. Moreover, many malarial areas do not have access to the sorts of socioeconomic and geographic benefits that Americans did in the early twentieth century. Historian and physician Margaret Humphreys has argued, in fact, that in the United States, DDT was overkill—intentional and accidental housing changes and health reforms had already brought malaria under control by the time the U.S. Public Health Service began spraying in the 1940s. Indeed, by 1943, malaria cases had become so sporadic that eradication campaigns focused not on the disease, but on the mosquito. The continued fear of malaria was based, in part, on a belief that the disease appeared cyclically, and that the South was long overdue for another major outbreak. The apparent absence of malaria in the early 1940s, malariologists feared, was the calm before the next storm. See Humphrey's article "Kicking a Dying Dog: DDT and the Demise of Malaria in the American South, 1942-1950," *Isis* 87 (March 1996): 1-2, 9, and her book, *Malaria: Poverty, Race, and Public Health in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Modern statistics can be found at University of Florida's Cooperative Extension Service site, www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu and at www.who.int/water_sanitation_health, the World Health Organization's site. Statistics contemporary to this study are in Frederick L. Hoffman, LL.D., *Malaria in Florida, Georgia and Alabama* (Newark, NJ: Prudential Press, 1932). See also Edward H. Beardsley, *A History of Neglect: Health Care for Blacks and Mill Workers in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 19-21.

fever and nausea. Eventually, malaria causes intermittent cycles of chills and high fever. Depending on the parasite that caused the infection, these effects range from moderate to lethal. It also is possible to be re-infected many times, so that a victim builds up a relative tolerance that averts fatality.

Like hookworm, malaria was simple, if not easy, enough to control, assuming that basic education reached those in danger and steps were taken to assist them in safeguarding themselves.¹⁹ The advised measures today are basically the same HDAs advocated in the interwar period: draining stagnant water, using netting and installing screens, and rapidly seeking treatment for infection. Because humans cannot contract malaria from animals, only from another infected person via an infected mosquito, all that was necessary to avoid malaria was to avoid mosquito bites. How ironic that something so simple proved so deadly. The relative simplicity, however, of controlling diseases like hookworm and malaria meant that there was hope that home demonstration could make a difference.

But reforming practices related to sanitation and hygiene, however, was more complicated than throwing together a privy or tacking up some screen. Improvements cost money, examinations required cooperation, and habits required changing. Cognizant of these challenges, HDAs helped clients fight for their health with four interconnected strategies: mental preparation and education, physical change and construction, interagency cooperation, and national involvement. Mental preparation and education meant that rural folks had to be

¹⁹Hookworm and malaria were not the only sanitation-oriented diseases afflicting rural Floridians. Scabies, what Southerners called “the itch,” was a nonfatal but terribly uncomfortable and unsightly disease contracted and perpetuated entirely by hygiene habits. It is found world-wide, is contagious and spreads rapidly in crowded and unsanitary communities. Simple and effective hygiene is fundamental to avoiding scabies, so access to clean water is paramount. Typhoid, a bacterial infection of the intestinal tract and bloodstream, was much more serious. Typhoid fever is contracted by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by sewage bearing the bacteria. The best defense is proper disposal of sewage, proper hygiene, like hand-washing, and proper food handling. Hepatitis, though rarely deadly, can occur in areas without a clean water supply—infection occurs the same way as for typhoid, and prevention is based on the same measures. See www.worldwaterday.org and www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

convinced to take the necessary steps to control dangers. Restructuring ideas about sanitation, however, did not apply only to rural families, but to extension workers, as well. Educating the public required a shift in how the Service categorized sanitation work. Prior to 1920, health work appeared as a brief mention in state reports, and agents did attend annual conferences at which health issues were on the program. But the food production and conservation demands of world war consumed the majority of HDAs' attention.

By the end of World War I, however, Florida's HDAs were grappling more overtly with sanitation problems and solutions. For example, Hillsborough County had developed a county council and devoted one of its committees to public health. At the same time, agents began recording improvements made in schools.²⁰ Even so, in the early 1920s the county agricultural agent, not the HDA, tallied physical sanitation improvements, such as the number of homes screened and the number of sanitary privies built, but agricultural agents did not describe the work in their narratives. Rather, home demonstration reports continued to discuss health work as part of their Foods and Nutrition narratives. Though it was good that both male and female agents were involved in sanitation work in some way, the gender lines had to be blurred further to accomplish more substantive gains.

Certainly, the connection between women and health was not unheard of, but women's activism in the hygiene arena was more recent.²¹ Particularly valuable for rural

²⁰ Sarah W. Partridge, "Report of the District Home Demonstration Agent for East and South Florida," *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Report of General Activities for 1918* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1919), 89; Harriette B. Layton, North and West Florida District AR 1918 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1920), 87; Agnes I. Webster, South and East Florida District AR 1918 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1921), 77, 78.

²¹ The relationship between women and health has been problematic, for both women and the medical community. Two simultaneous examples demonstrate what women experienced in their relationship to health. First, as in the case of "Typhoid Mary," women's expected and realized daily contact with foodstuffs and the home made them targets for health practitioners wishing to protect the public. Though bacteriology had made it clear that microbes were responsible for disease, "gendered subjective sentiments were woven into the fabric of public health even during the very years when the new science . . . seemed to be pushing the field in the direction of greater objectivity." At the same time, women

families was the participation of black women in health campaigns. Susan L. Smith examines health work by and for African-Americans and has discovered an “unbroken line of black women’s health activism since at least the 1890s.” Those activists were a diverse group, and they included home demonstration agents.²² Wiping out disease, among both black and white Southerners, was motivation indeed for these activist-agents to become more directly involved in sanitation work. By 1924, home demonstration reports included “home health and sanitation” as part of Home Improvement. Finally, it appears that sanitation and public health had moved into the realm of “women’s work.” Male extension agents, however, did not abandon the work themselves—women’s increased involvement did not perpetuate a one-sided program, it enhanced a cooperative one.²³

Once sanitation work was resituated as a home demonstration and community responsibility, the task of education could begin in earnest. But HDAs were not working alone or over untested territory. Home demonstration was carrying on a well-established tradition in sanitation and health work, Susan Smith’s “unbroken line.” In 1904, Anna T.

were finding avenues of respectability and authority via science. Through domestic science women found a route to recognized professionalization. Indeed, domestic science was widely called “sanitary science,” and it incorporated disciplines important in the wake of Progressive concerns: public health, chemistry, nutrition, home economics and sociology. On the tension experienced by female physicians, see Regina Morantz, “Feminism, Professionalism and Germs: A Study of the Thought of Mary Putnam Jacobi and Elizabeth Blackwell,” in *Women and the Structure of Society. Selected Research from the Fifth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women*, eds. Barbara J. Harris and JoAnn K. McNamara (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984): 170-188. See Judith Walzer Leavitt, “Gendered Expectations: Women and Early Twentieth-Century Public Health,” in *U. S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays* eds. Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995): 147-149; Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 15.

²² Susan L. Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women’s Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 1-2.

²³ Sarah W. Partridge, State Home Demonstration AR 1921 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1922), 27; A. P. Spencer, Vice-Director and County Agent Leader AR 1922 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1923), 27; Flavia Gleason, State Home Demonstration AR 1924 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1925), 71-72, 26.

Jeanes, a Quaker philanthropist, used a million-dollar donation to launch a campaign to improve black schools. The women who carried out her work came to be called “Jeanes teachers,” and part of their task was to enhance the quality of education by stressing the need for cleanliness. On the heels of the Jeanes fund came another philanthropic organization, the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission (RSC). The RSC’s initial and primary objective was to raise awareness of and eradicate hookworm in the South. Like the Jeanes teachers, RSC workers believed that the health battle required not just treatment but education—the one true cure was prevention. In North Carolina, especially, the RSC was successful because it collaborated with the Woman’s Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses, founded in 1902. The combined influence of that association, the RSC and the Jeanes teachers was vital to the reform of Southern healthways in that they helped establish a mass education framework. Home demonstration was able to pick up where these organizations left off, especially as the RSC went international, and bring health education into numerous rural homes.²⁴

Once home demonstration was in position to attack sanitation deficiencies, the first step in mentally preparing rural families was altering some fundamental beliefs. Even a basic understanding of disease had to be reshaped. By no means was this a challenge specific to rural communities. We are familiar with has come to be called the “germ theory” of disease;

²⁴ For a quick overview of these early twentieth-century health crusades, see Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The Pursuit of American Cleanliness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 129-132. A brief, useful study of the RSC is in J. Ettling, “The Role of the Rockefeller Foundation,” in *Hookworm Disease: Current Status and New Directions*, eds. G. A. Schad and K. S. Warren (London and New York: Taylor and Harris, 1990), 3-16. Ettling describes the transition that transformed the RSC from a relatively local program to an international one. In 1913, it began work as the International Health Commission, and (partly for political reasons) stopped all the local work underway in 1915. Ettling, 3, 12.

we associate the spread of germs with the spread of illness.²⁵ In contrast, those interested in sanitation in the nineteenth century believed that miasmatic pollution, essentially bad gases or vapors, caused illness.²⁶ Those who believed that miasmas afflicted them sometimes arranged their sanitary practices in such a way that odors were out of sight, out of smell, and so at a safe distance, even if that meant emptying chamber pots into the street or moving a privy far from a doorway, but near a more distant water source. Ronald Barlow, an outhouse researcher, cites one example of the common thinking related to proper sanitation. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, doctors objected to the total cleansing of the streets and gutters because they believed it was best to leave some physical filth around to attract “those putrescent particles which are ever present in the air,” creating effluvium-based air filters. As a result, families built privies, major improvements over slop jars and open-air toilets, but placed them near the kitchen to keep the hearthside sanitary.²⁷

Indoor bathrooms were even more problematic for many rural folks. Though many people bathed in the house, they regarded relieving themselves as something naturally suited

²⁵ As early as 1910, editorials in the *Journal of Home Economics* were calling for a cessation to the “rare form of insanity” brought on by the “application of a little knowledge of bacteria to every phase of life.” Editorial, *Journal of Home Economics* 2 (February 1910): 97. What is most remarkable is how quickly “the bacteria scare” seemed to have spread among the public once bacteriology became accepted. By the end of that year, the *JHE* was including articles on “Teaching Bacteriology to Mothers.”

²⁶ In her study of female physicians at the turn of the century, Regina Morantz notes the tensions between old and new theories of disease. She writes, “One of the most bewildering controversies to twentieth-century observers remains the reluctance of many nineteenth-century physicians and public health advocates to accept the discoveries of the bacteriologists. How could such men and women persist in speaking of ‘effluvia,’ ‘miasma,’ and ‘filth’ when the precise experimentation of Pasteur, Koch, and their followers had . . . ushered in the concept of specific etiology?” The problem was not ignorance, but conceptualization, that “bacteriological concepts called into question an older and deeply internalized view of disease that was holistic in its scope, moralistic in its implications, and fundamentally religious in its point of departure.” Morantz, 172.

²⁷ Ronald S. Barlow, *The Vanishing American Outhouse. A History of Country Plumbing* (El Cajon, CA: Windmill Publishing Company, 1989), 81-82, 2; M. Jay Stottman, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Privy Architecture and the Perception of Sanitation,” *Historical Archaeology* 34 (Spring 2000): 39-61; Brian D. Crane, “Filth, Garbage and Rubbish: Refuse Disposal, Sanitary Reform, and Nineteenth Century Yard Deposits in Washington, D. C.” *Historical Archaeology* 34 (Spring 2000): 20-38.

to the outdoors. Depositing excrement inside the house, even in a bathroom with facilities that removed the waste, just did not seem to make sense.²⁸ Other people refused to use an indoor bathroom as a matter of principle, including one Alachua County woman's father-in-law. After she convinced her husband that they needed a bathroom to go with the running water they already had, her father-in-law refused to use the bathroom for any reason; to him, it was a frivolous waste of money and effort. Finally, however, Alachua agent Grace Warren met the woman and her family in town and noticed that the father-in-law was looking quite sharp, healthier than he ever had looked before. "'Well, I finally got him in the bath tub,' the woman explained, 'and . . . he found that bathing made him feel and look better, so now he bathes regularly.'"²⁹ Old habits die hard, and they remained one of the great challenges to HDAs' work in sanitation.

But HDAs knew that bacteria, microbes and parasites carried disease, and that they grew in any number of unsavory places, and that any number of unsavory organisms might carry them to skin, clothing, water and food.³⁰ It was critical that health educators pass along this knowledge so that rural folks were better prepared to get well. For example, publications from both the Georgia and Florida State Boards of Health attacked the misconceptions that malaria could be caught from breathing night air, *drinking* bad water, or eating the wrong foods. The Florida bulletin advised readers, "Protect yourself when out in the night air, and

²⁸On this and other conditions limiting sanitation reform, see Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 205-207. My mother's grandmother, though she lived quite comfortably in her home in Wisconsin until her death in 1969, never installed an indoor bathroom.

²⁹ Grace Warren, Alachua AR 1933 (SL-23), 8-9.

³⁰Suellen Hoy discusses the growing awareness of bacteriology in the context of Hull House workers' assessment of a 1902 outbreak of typhoid fever. Since the outbreak followed a mass-cleaning of miasmic pollutants, they knew there had to be another source of the disease—"this time they looked in the drains for the cause of the disaster." By then, microbiology and immunology had made considerable headway explaining who got sick and why. The shift began in the 1880s and by 1890 the new understanding had crystallized. Hoy, 104-107.

when in the swamp, from the always present mosquito, and you will remain free from malaria in spite of all the night air and obnoxious odors you can breathe into your lungs.”³¹

Armed with basic knowledge, home demonstration worked with other organizations to extend it to as many families as possible. Knowledge was power, and was a critical resource for families fighting disease and illness, especially where many rural families accepted pests like mosquitoes as a “matter of course.”³² In 1928, Virginia Moore noted the impact education was having on sanitation work. “There is more interest in Home Sanitation,” she wrote. “I believe it is because we are stressing the educational side and getting the vital facts before the people in such a way that fathers and mothers are really believing that it is necessary to have sanitary premises and home surroundings.”³³ Much of the sanitation rhetoric focused on cleanliness; flies became the poster child for filth and infection, earning them the title “germs with legs.” As part of a Home Improvement series in 1931, Moore compiled a questionnaire called “Questions on Home Sanitation to Make You Think.” In it, she addressed location of water supply, screening, privies, clean surroundings, compost heaps, whitewashing and mosquitoes.

In a battery of questions designed to inform, inspire, and shock readers, Moore attempted to heighten their understanding of just how filthy the untended rural home could be—and provoke them into remedying the situation. To her credit, Moore did not pull punches, jumping right in with “Do you realize that your well may be getting the drainage from the toilet, the pig pen or the stable?” and “Are you sure that your well is free from dead

³¹ “Mosquitoes and Malarial Control,” 8; Graham E. Henson, M.D., E. Van Hood, M.D., and E. W. Warren, M.D., “Malaria: Its Prevention and Control,” Publication 84, State Board of Health of Florida (June 1911), 17.

³² Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1929 (SL-16), 8.

³³ Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1928 (SL-14), 9-10.

frogs, birds, or animals?” Unsettling questions, indeed, but a blunt approach was more likely to encourage rapid changes in habits when it came to the risks posed by contaminated water. The questions only got more pointed as the bulletin went on, especially as Moore made direct connections between the privy and the kitchen: “do you know the common house fly . . . lays its eggs in horse manure, the outdoor toilet and door yard filth?” Where the fly laid eggs was bad enough, but what happened next was worse: “Do you know where the fly that crawls over the food or falls into the milk pitcher came from the last time he lighted?”³⁴

Inciting alarm and disgust was only the first step. Moore and the Service also provided resources to “Swat the Fly” and his unsanitary brethren. HDAs believed that education went beyond shock to knowledge. That meant that education was two-fold, including both practical how-to advice and scientific detail. In addition to providing bulletins like “Mosquito Proofing Your Home,” Moore also used the “Malarial Catechism” that included information on the life cycle of the mosquito. HDAs understood that because many rural folks were not well-educated did not mean they were dumb. Education was not just for adults, either. For example, 4-H campers in 1931 spent time studying the life cycles and breeding preferences of the fly, mosquito and hookworm.³⁵ Understanding why screens and sanitary privies were necessary paved the way for physical reform and construction.

Two primary goals shaped the composition of a cleaner countryside: putting up barriers between pests and people, and providing clean water on demand. First, in order to control mosquito and fly populations, and the diseases they carried, HDAs followed the lead of medical science and stressed screening windows, door and porches. Screens were an especially important fixture because another of the fundamental rules for good health HDAs

³⁴ Hoy, 132-33; Virginia P. Moore, “Questions on Home Sanitation to Make You Think,” Circular No. 987 (Gainesville: University of Florida, reprint 1931).

³⁵ Moore, “Questions on Home Sanitation”; Virginia P. Moore, “Home Improvement,” Cooperative Extension Service AR 1931 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1932), 117.

touted was plenty of fresh air via open windows.³⁶ HDAs also advocated a practice designed to stop mosquito breeding in the first place. In marshy areas prone to mosquito infestations, common across Florida, agents recommended filling fertilizer sacks with sawdust and saturating them with used machine oil, weighting them and sinking them in the boggy areas. The result was a film of oil on the water that prevented mosquitoes from breeding and living there. And, as expected, agents advised rural families to ditch and drain the land as needed to prevent new breeding grounds.³⁷

The second major physical reform was the construction of water systems and sanitary privies, both designed to protect the water supply from contaminants and promote cleanliness. Like many technologies related to rural reforms, historians have tended to see water systems in terms of gendered labor and modernization. For example, the photo below calls to mind perceptions of running water as a labor-saver, and certainly that was true. But there is another issue at work. The more difficult it was to procure a supply of fresh, clean water, the less likely that a family would maintain a more healthful level of cleanliness. Even a simple water system could be a great boon to both convenience and health, but water systems varied greatly in their complexity and cost. A simple system that required little in the way of materials and labor might cost as little as \$26, while a family could expect to spend as much as \$300 for more elaborate systems.³⁸ Though it was possible to have a complete water system with

³⁶ Ellen LeNoir, Lonny Landrum, North and West District AR 1922 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1923), 73. On the fresh air/bad air debate see Peter C. Baldwin, "How Night Air Became Good Air, 1776-1930," *Environmental History* 8 (July 2003): 412-429.

³⁷ This advice appears in several sources, including Virginia P. Moore's "Question on Home Sanitation." Proof that families actually were following such recommendations can be found in Alice Poole's report for Leon County. As part of National Negro Health Week, some Leon families took as a project to "remedy the mosquito evil," and some of them secured used oil from filling stations and used it to saturate bags of sawdust secured from local mills. Then, just as recommended, they sunk the bags in standing ponds. Alice W. Poole, Leon AR 1930 (SL-19), 7.

³⁸ Running water was by no means universal in America's rural homes, but there was a wide disparity between the percentage of homes with running water in the South and in the rest of the country. In

running water for both kitchen and bath, including a sink, toilet and bathtub, a family might have easily accessible water via an arrangement as simple as a hand pump to fill a barrel and a pipe to connect the barrel to the kitchen sink.

Of course, both HDAs and rural families were inventive when resources were limited but interest was not. In 1928 Holmes County, a Mrs. Murphy had made exterior improvements to her home and was interested in next adding running water. She ran out of funds and could not afford to buy a bathtub, but she did own a “good cypress coffin, stored away awaiting her death.” As Virginia Moore related Mrs. Murphy’s decision, “she decided to use that coffin for ‘living’ instead of for ‘dying’” and converted it into a bathtub.³⁹

The single most important sanitary project a rural family could undertake was installation of a sanitary privy. Though some designs were prohibitively expensive, many were simple and within the means of most families. Where funds were limited, agents had only to argue that no one could afford not to construct a privy.⁴⁰ By the mid-1920s HDAs had begun to spearhead the privy-construction campaign on the ground. In her 1924 report, East and South district agent Lucy Belle Settle laid out a series of recommendations for the following year. Two of her four Home Improvement measures involved privies: “the removal of all unsightly materials, including outhouses improperly located,” and “the building of

1920, thirty percent of farm homes in the Northeast, eleven percent in the Midwest and twenty-six percent in the Far West reported having running water, compared to three percent in the South. Before 1950, the percentage in the South barely moved, increasing to six percent in 1930 and eight percent in 1940, compared with fifty-six percent in the Northeast. In 1950, Southern farm homes with water jumped to twenty-two percent, but by then the rest of the country was up to between fifty and sixty percent. By 1960, forty-six percent of Southern farm homes had water, while eighty-six percent of those in the Northeast and the Far West, and sixty-four percent of those in the Midwest reported running water. See Kline, 289.

³⁹Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1928 (SL-14), 8.

⁴⁰Frazier Rogers, *Water and Sewerage Systems for Florida Rural Homes*, Bulletin 46 (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1926), 1-11.

sanitary outhouses, including toilets.”⁴¹ Any privy was an immediate improvement over the practices of many rural Southerners, who used a slop jar and then tossed its contents out the back door, or simply answered nature’s call in whatever part of the open outdoors in which they found themselves. With that in mind, one of the fundamental rules all sanitation reformers, including HDAs, attempted to ingrain in children was to “always use the privy.”⁴²

Once families were willing to consistently use a privy, it was critical that the facilities were properly placed, constructed and maintained. Many rudimentary privies were simply pits in the earth covered by a simple wooden frame shed, open in the back. The pits might have been lined with boards or barrels to facilitate cleaning, which occurred usually when the pit was full—depending on its depth, excavations might be years apart. Instead of cleaning the pit, an owner could just backfill the hole, pick up the shed cover and move to a new site a few yards away. Additionally, many farmers insisted on using fresh night soil as fertilizer, but health officials were adamant that such a practice was “a false economy which may result in loss of human life.”⁴³

But what made a “sanitary privy” sanitary? That standard evolved as science caught up with germs and disease, but many privies were haphazard at best, and far from safe. In 1908, a pamphlet devoted to “Home Sanitation and Hygiene” described plans for sanitary privies that met all the requirements for security and health, and were simple enough for a teenaged boy to build with minimal expense. At the time, the bulletin suggested using a tub, candy bucket or water-tight barrel as a receptacle, but insisted that a number of screened ventilators be installed (to promote air circulation and deter flies), that seats have lids, and that

⁴¹ Lucy Belle Settle, *South and East Florida District AR 1924* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1925), 81.

⁴² Deanne Stephens Nuwer, “The Importance of Wearing Shoes: Hookworm Disease in Mississippi,” *Mississippi History Now* Feature 31 (<http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/features/feature31/hookworm.html>).

⁴³ Barlow, 6, 101.

any other openings have doors or screens. It also recommended an alternate and supposedly better solution for excavation than allowing waste to accumulate or be carelessly disposed of, opting instead for emptying receptacles weekly and letting the contents stand covered for a sufficient time to kill germs through fermentation. The bulletin's author cautioned that science had not yet been able to determine how long "eggs and spores" of parasites could survive. As a result, it was best to burn or boil excreta, and then bury it away from water sources.⁴⁴

By the 1920s, analysis of waste and its collection had become considerably more scientific and certain. In 1922 and again in 1928, the USDA issued a thorough bulletin, "Sewage and Sewerage of Farm Homes." The bulletin described the details of what constituted sewage (namely, the contents of "any spittoon, slop pail, sink drain, urinal, privy, cesspool, sewage tank, or sewage distribution field"), the potential dangers of sewage, and precise methods of sewage management. The bulletin drew clear distinctions between the kinds of available privies and their relative safety, beginning with the barely suitable pit privy I described above.⁴⁵

According to the USDA, the "next step in evolution" is the sanitary privy, the standard for which the bulletin allows little compromise. A privy could only be regarded as sanitary if "its construction . . . [is] such that it is practically impossible for filth or germs to be spread above ground, to escape by percolation underground, or to be accessible to flies, vermin, chickens or animals." Furthermore, (and we thought an outhouse was just an outhouse),

⁴⁴ "Home Sanitation and Hygiene" in Ronald S. Barlow, *The Vanishing American Outhouse. A History of Country Plumbing* (El Cajon, CA: Windmill Publishing Company, 1989), 101-103.

⁴⁵ "Sewage and Sewerage of Farm Homes," Farmers' Bulletin No. 1227 (1922, 1928) in Ronald S. Barlow, *The Vanishing American Outhouse. A History of Country Plumbing* (El Cajon, CA: Windmill Publishing Company, 1989), 107.

It must be cared for in a cleanly manner, else it cease to be sanitary . . . The container for a sanitary privy may be small—for example, a galvanized iron pail or garbage can, to be removed from time to time by hand; it may be large, as a barrel or metal tank mounted for moving; or it may be a stationary underground metal tank or masonry vault. The essential requirement in the receptacle is permanent water-tightness to prevent pollution of soils and wells. Wooden pails or boxes, which warp and leak, should not be used.”

As anyone who has ever camped or used a chemical toilet knows, treating excrement is as important, and as unpleasant, as containing it. The USDA bulletin outlined three possible methods for neutralizing waste, including dry earth, chemical and disinfectant. For all their attractive attributes, however, sanitary privies had one major weakness. Their sanitary quality depended heavily on users’ consistent upkeep. Where resources allowed, the optimum system for managing waste from all sources was running water that drew waste from the home to a permanent treatment facility outside, ideally a septic tank.⁴⁶

As Virginia Moore’s simple statement on the sanitary options in rural Florida attests, and these descriptions demonstrate, outhouses were not quaint, cute, charming or any of the other precious qualities we assign them today. Just like pressure canners were, sanitary privies were relatively modern, evolving technologies with the potential to save lives and increase security. Many of the forces working to ensure that more families relied upon a sanitary privy and other hygienic tools did not have direct and daily access to those people—but HDAs did. Suddenly, the raw numbers of homes reporting privy installations or new water systems under home demonstration guidance seems much less routine.

HDAs did not have just access, though—they had a plan. As reformers and federal envoys, they perfectly suited the task of disseminating the information contained in USDA and Board of Health bulletins. HDAs and their demonstration methods proved a vital link in the sanitation war. Federal and state agencies wrote a bulletin, HDAs distributed and

⁴⁶ “Sewage and Sewerage,” 114-123, 126.

explained the bulletin, rural families followed the bulletin and proved that the methods worked, and more rural families decided to adopt new practices, too. Even more important, HDAs earned families' trust, something few other reformers could have done with the access and time available to them. Sanitation issues often were pretty private matters, and we might imagine that many women would be reluctant to discuss their habits and functions with anyone not a member of their own family or a doctor. But I have been struck by women's apparent trust and respect for HDAs in sanitation matters.

Among all families trust was vital for health work to take place in any meaningful way. Especially in black communities, where residents were more removed from and wary of white administrative personnel, HDAs were in a crucial position to open minds to and engage families in practices that could restore vitality.⁴⁷ In close-knit communities, HDAs were not just home demonstration agents, but respected members of a leadership usually dominated by local pastors. Nothing helped an HDA win over her families like the ringing endorsement of local clergy, and that cooperative spirit proved most valuable for health work. Local organizations such as churches and civic clubs had consistently assisted HDAs by promoting hygiene education. Florida's agent in charge of Negro extension, A. A. Turner, praised the work of local pastors who encouraged the men and women of their congregations to attend extension schools and follow recommendations for cleanliness and health.⁴⁸ HDAs could not have asked for more reliable and effective partners in health reform.

HDAs also found that, as with most of their proposed reforms, children were more receptive to new ideas than their parents were. Many agents worked with children in a way that not only fostered their own better habits, but encouraged them to take their new practices home and inspire their families to do likewise. The easiest way to influence the most children

⁴⁷ Smith, 92-93.

⁴⁸ A. A. Turner, *Negro Extension Work AR 1922* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1923), 93.

was to begin sanitation work in schools.⁴⁹ In Okaloosa County, Bertha Henry helped launch a full-scale school sanitation campaign. In 1924, no school in the county had a privy. But, as part of Henry's Clean Schools Campaign, by 1926 ten schools had met hygiene standards, including installing sanitary privies. By 1927, schools in Okaloosa had embarked on a more ambitious Health Crusade that focused on a safe water supply, prevention and cure of scabies, privy installation and pest elimination. Towards that end, Henry made a consistent effort to distribute bulletins to both white and black school teachers and encourage them to share the information with their students. A year later, Henry praised the county's work and declared it a victor in the Crusade. And just as she had hoped, the newly sanitary schools had become models for their communities.⁵⁰ Mary Todd Mackenzie also found that schools were vital links between the different components of health work. During National Negro Health Week in 1934, Mackenzie noted various projects schoolchildren undertook to put the health cause before the public, including poster contests, a health honor roll and a door-to-door canvas led by 4-H members and teachers.⁵¹

While working with schools, HDAs accomplished more than setting good examples. Children directly benefited from health examinations, school lunches, and immunizations. Health clinics based at schools targeted and treated hookworm and other "defects," and distributed information intended to prevent re-infection. Immunizations against smallpox,

⁴⁹Hiram Byrd recognized the power of schools in inspiring community change in 1910. Schools represented both grave danger and great promise where hookworm was concerned—the dense collection of students and the absence of sanitary facilities meant that even one infected pupil could start a chain reaction in which hookworm infestations would multiply exponentially. But schools also represented an opportunity to gather, educate and aid a large body of rural communities' most tractable people. Then, rather than the children spreading hookworm through the schools, they would spread health through their families. "What a strategic point in the hookworm crusade!" Byrd crowed. Byrd, 37, 54.

⁵⁰Bertha Henry, Okaloosa AR 1922, (SL), 25; Henry, Okaloosa AR 1926 (SL), 8; Henry, Okaloosa AR 1927 (SL), 12-13.

⁵¹Mary Todd Mackenzie, Alachua AR 1934 (SL-25), 6.

typhoid and diphtheria, sponsored by the State Board of Health and county nurses, protected hundreds of children from further illness. In black communities, immunizations were especially important. In 1931 alone, more than 800 African-Americans in rural Florida reported having been immunized. The same preventive measures were benefiting white communities, in almost as great a number.⁵² And HDAs did not relegate sanitary reform to schools and private homes. So important was it that everyone had access to and use sanitary facilities that HDAs made sure their own offices had sanitary restrooms and running water—and made them available to the public.⁵³ These local alliances and leaders were indispensable to what HDAs hoped to accomplish in rural sanitation reform, but they also depended upon and involved themselves with larger, national bodies, including the USDA, National Negro Health Week, National Health Contest and the New Deal.

HDAs could enhance their work with a feature that critics have been quick to see as wholly intrusive, but proved an asset in sanitation reforms. Not only were HDAs familiar with and part of local communities, where they earned trust, they were members of a federal agency, which gave them access to resources. Money remained limited as always, but a bureaucratic infrastructure balanced red tape with access to research, media services and manpower. The most important commodity in sanitation reform was information, and HDAs' position helped them conduct information much more directly between researchers, reformers and families.

Like the USDA, there were other agencies with national scope and institutionalized efficiency, such as the Anti-Tuberculosis Society and State Boards of Health, and HDAs did not decline to work with them. There were certain advantages to working with colder, less personable agencies like the Board of Health. For example, the Health Department could

⁵²Julia Miller, *Negro Home Demonstration AR 1931* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1932), 144.

⁵³Webster, 78.

relieve HDAs of some of the more sensitive explanations about sanitation, though HDAs never shied away from stressing the need for and paths to reformed sanitation habits. In Escambia County, little sanitation work was done until the county nurse and the Board of Health became involved in 1926. Part of the delay, to be sure, was agent Floresa Sipprell's reluctance to press a sensitive program on unwilling demonstrators. Once the Board of Health had presented women with the gritty details, agents could re-enter the process as advisors and confidantes.⁵⁴ That important position as normalizers made HDAs all the more valuable in the sanitation reform process.

HDAs also filled a gap in a predominantly male medical world. As women, HDAs could build on the caretaker tradition and promote action among other women. Designed for, staffed by, and lived by women, home demonstration was a fitting partner for the National Negro Health Week (NNHW). Begun by Booker T. Washington in 1915 to galvanize health care by and for black Americans, the movement was female-powered on the ground, even as men steered it nationally.⁵⁵ Indeed, NNHW was itself rooted in the earlier efforts of African-American clubwomen's sanitation campaigns, in which they encouraged black families to take charge of their health and called for increased attention to and resources for families on the periphery of health provision. Whatever Washington's motivations, personal and political, the women who brought the national campaign for black health to the people, often with the

⁵⁴ See Floresa Sipprell, Escambia AR 1926 (SL-#), 6; Floresa Sipprell, Escambia AR 1925 (SL-#), 17.. Home demonstration pioneer Jane McKimmon noted such a process in North Carolina, where Health officials delivered information about diseases like cancer and syphilis, then HDAs stepped in to help women make sense of it all. See Jane S. McKimmon, *When We're Green We Grow* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), 251.

⁵⁵ NNHW was headquartered at Tuskegee Institute from 1915 until 1930, when the U. S. Public Health Service took over and made the Week into a year-long program. Since NNHW was begun in the era of Jim Crow, Washington responded to outside pressure by focusing the campaign for black health with calls for federal assistance based on "needs" rather than "rights." In practice, the dynamics of NNHW tended to foster interracial and intraracial cooperation—I suspect the work of female activists like club women and HDAs had a good deal to do with this. See Susan L. Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 33-39.

assistance of HDAs, put black Southerners in a position to benefit directly from the combined determination of national and local activists working specifically for clients normally on the fringe.

Yet again, HDAs were a link between a home or a neighborhood and the outside world. In Alabama, Washington's plan for uplift meshed well with the Cooperative Extension Service—after 1914, home demonstration could apply and extend Washington's mission, while agents enjoyed the added credibility and flexibility that Tuskegee provided. In a period when Jim Crow stunted reform work for black Southerners, the mutually reinforcing efforts of Tuskegee and the Extension Service provided crucial access to improved health.⁵⁶

In Florida, agent Julia Miller noted the real-time benefits of the NNHW in conjunction with local home demonstration and state efforts—hundreds of new privies to ward off hookworm, hundreds of homes screened against filthy flies and dangerous mosquitoes, and immunizations to protect thousands of children from debilitating illness.⁵⁷ Black HDAs actively encouraged their clients to participate in NNHW for both its practical and social value. Mary Todd Mackenzie, Alachua County's Negro HDA, reported with pride her county's work toward health in 1934. As part of the overall emphasis on health, she and the farm agent sent out a series of letters to local families urging them to celebrate NNHW by concentrating on their health not just for one week, but for fifty-two.⁵⁸

Another nationwide event, the National Health Contest, inspired rural women to fine tune their own health and hygiene habits. In 1929, Florida agents predicted that girls and women throughout Florida would be far more interested in health work after the National contest was won by a Florida representative, Florence Smock, and another Florida girl placed

⁵⁶ See Stevens, 7.

⁵⁷ Jones, 154-55; Miller, 1929, 101; Miller, 1931, 144; Miller, 1932, 87.

⁵⁸ Mary Todd Mackenzie, Alachua AR 1934 (SL-25), 6.

second. Health contests not only buoyed local reform efforts through competitiveness, but fostered a sense of belonging by broadening narrow experiences and exposing rural families to what HDAs called “American conditions” of healthful living.⁵⁹

A final national agenda, the New Deal, made significant contributions to HDAs’ sanitation work. No agencies were more prominent in their practical contribution to home demonstration sanitation reforms than the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Not only did federalizing some of the sanitation work increase funding and personnel in general, the influx of funding and standardization also effectively leveled the quality of health programs around the state.⁶⁰ In Depression-wracked Florida, dwindling funds had slowed, but not halted, sanitation work like privy construction. Many New Deal relief efforts made their way into rural Florida, with notable yields. For example, agent Ethel Atkinson recorded FERA’s impact in Escambia County, where relief workers spent time on drainage projects, siphoning away standing water to reduce mosquito populations. Their efforts paid off; by 1939 Atkinson reported only a very few cases of typhoid or malaria among rural Escambians. Most remarkable was the WPA’s work as an active component of Florida’s Malaria Department, helping with wide scale screening campaigns.⁶¹

Nationwide, the WPA constructed or renovated more than two million privies, each meeting federal standards with a concrete base, airtight seat and screened ventilators. Locally, too, Florida residents experienced the privy boom. For example, in a typical year Escambia County residents installed fewer than 100 sanitary privies, but in 1939 more than 160 new

⁵⁹Cooperative Extension Service AR 1929, 72; Cooperative Extension Service AR 1922, 84-86.

⁶⁰Beardsley, 41, 156.

⁶¹See “Malaria—Escambia County, January-June 1938,” Division of Health Subject Files, Box 4, Folder 7. Record Group 810, Series 899 and “Malaria—Escambia County, 1937” (Florida State Archives, Division of Health Subject Files, Box 4, Folder 46. Record Group 810, Series 899).

backhouses dotted the landscape. According to Atkinson, the WPA built sanitary privies for anyone willing to furnish either the materials or \$5.⁶² Home demonstration's experience with the WPA reflects the benefits to be gleaned from cooperating with agencies beyond the Extension Service.

The ability to put local reforms in a national context, as HDAs did with NNHW and the National Health Contest, fortified their emphasis on community and national responsibility and rural folks' own sense of a place within a larger health movement. The more rural families saw improved sanitary features around them, the more inspired they became to create the same sort of environment for themselves. One Alachua County woman reported to her agent in 1933 that, after returning home from a relief meeting, she was struck by the difference between her facilities and those discussed at meetings. "When . . . I saw my unsightly old open toilet I just could not stand it any longer," she wrote. "The next morning my sister and I tore it down and with the help of an inexperienced carpenter we soon had a sanitary toilet built according to the instructions of the State Board of Health." The long-term effect was not just on this woman's health, but on her sense of dignity: "When the club met the next time the meeting was at my house and it gave me a feeling of pride to be able to show the members my nice new sanitary toilet."⁶³

Of course, an influx of funding during the New Deal also presented some problems related to the quality of sanitary improvements. As part of her Home Improvement work, Virginia Moore had categorized Florida rural homes by their level of comfort, efficiency and sanitary features. The challenge she saw arising in the wake of New Deal aid was a dramatic increase in "maximum" housing that manifested only "minimum" standards. For example, a

⁶²Ethel Atkinson, Escambia County AR 1934 (SL), 17; Ethel Atkinson, Escambia County AR 1939 (SL), 18; Barlow, 22.

⁶³ Grace Warren, Alachua AR 1933 (SL-23), 9.

family might have a new home with an indoor bathroom, and use the bathtub to store coal or wood.⁶⁴

It is little wonder that sanitation and rural health caught HDAs' attention, but what impact did home demonstration really have on sanitation reform, and it on home demonstration? Numerous agencies were already involved, or became involved, in these reforms, so HDAs were not the last best hope for rural sanitation reform. However, given the prevalence of disease in Florida and the South, whatever assistance home demonstration could provide was essential, particularly because HDAs could reach reform's audience on a daily basis. In the case of the New Deal-era reforms, HDAs had been reaching that audience for quite some time. Virginia Moore, ever mindful of home demonstration's potential, twice made it clear that HDAs like her had been in the trenches before the New Deal. First, in 1934 Moore noted that, before the Federal Farm Housing Survey was commissioned, she had previously made many of the same recommendations it ultimately did. Then, in 1939, when cataloguing for extension's silver anniversary the number of sanitary privies constructed (583 in 1929), she noted that these accomplishments "preceded the W. P. A. project."⁶⁵

It is worth noting, too, that home demonstration and the official Extension apparatus emerged in time to fill a gap in the health crusade. The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission, which had spearheaded the hookworm eradication effort since 1910, left the South in 1914 to

⁶⁴Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1938 (SL-32), 2-3, 4. The housing levels Moore defined as "minimum": "those frame houses which are uneeiled, with wooden shutters, no conveniences, and which are surrounded with stubble fields, sandy yards with an outlook of cut-over timber land, washing gullies of the tenant farmer, and the small land owner of the northwest Florida;" "medium": "is a little better, with glass windows and ceiled walls but with no thought of real comfort, convenience or beauty;" and "maximum": the house is usually painted and screened and more comforts and conveniences have been added with better exterior surroundings." In areas of northwest, central and the deep south of Florida where truck farming and dairying prevailed, and where farmers lived in or near towns, the homes were much better, usually "with running water, electric lights, bath rooms with heated water by a Sunshine Water Heater." The "Spanish type of houses" common in south Florida Moore found lacking in good planning—their tile roofs, she said, were too prone to leaks.

⁶⁵ Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1934 (SL-25), 18; Virginia P. Moore, Home Improvement AR 1939, "Historical Data Relative to Home Improvement Work in Florida" (SL-34), 9.

go global as the International Health Commission. Then, the demands of World War I consumed government resources and time. After the war, health leaders like the RSC, U. S. Public Health Service and state Boards of Health focused on urban areas as more manageable and cost-effective than rural neighborhoods.⁶⁶ Progressive-style reform in the countryside was subdued until the reform boom of the 1930s, made possible by the New Deal. So, when Smith-Lever passed in 1914, the time was ripe for an infusion of reform advocates alert to rural needs and solutions, with the ground-level access necessary to empower individuals and communities.

That access raises some more expansive issues related to home demonstration and sanitation reform. The health story is one critical in studies of home demonstration because it hits a central nerve in the scholarship as historians continue to debate the extent to which home demonstration was either invasive and controlling or ameliorative and obliging. By now, readers probably can guess my take on this debate. Though the actual programs differed in significant ways, the implications of sanitation reform are strikingly similar to food preservation. Being sick but not knowing why or how to get well cost rural families their time, money and sense of security. Frankly, I am less concerned with the impact of rural Florida's health on the economic well-being of the South or the nation than I am with the impact illness and wellness had on families' daily lives. People deserve to be well.

As I stressed with food preservation, the fundamental relationship in health and sanitation work was that between knowledge and power. Security meant control for rural families, and control could not be gained without the knowledge to first gain security. No pamphlet, no address failed to stress the absolute necessity of getting information to the people, and securing their cooperation in employing it. Home demonstration was uniquely

⁶⁶ Hoy, 132; Beardsley, 21.

suited to do both. That ability and their willingness to follow through gave HDAs' sanitation work a tangible sense of promise. Unlike the ambivalent standards for home décor, landscaping, or sewing work, the direct connection between sanitation and disease meant one very important thing—every fly trap, every privy, every screen counted.

Inevitably, someone will counter that there were not enough privies, fly traps and screens to make a “real” difference, that home demonstration did not actually “do” anything because not enough women were directly involved. I have as little patience with that theory as I had with similar ones about food preservation. If our standard for health reforms was total participation, total change and total eradication, all without offending anyone locally, then no health work would be underway. Malaria is pandemic, and not all children have been saved—should the WHO, Red Cross, Peace Corps, and their partners quit and go home because they have not been able to “do” anything? Sanitation and health are not the sorts of standards we can wholly quantify. More than just compilations of privies and screens, sanitation work was about giving people the chance to take control of their own health by providing them with the information and tools necessary to take action if they saw fit—and giving them the jolt to ensure they would see fit.

Of course the ideal outcome of health reforms is that everyone at risk can be helped and wants to be helped. But the details of the sorts of diseases and affliction borne in bad water remind us that any progress is good progress. A little girl less than five years old suffering with malaria and most likely dying? A sixteen year old boy who will spend the rest of his life looking and thinking like a ten year old because hookworm robbed him of his health year after year? Modern reformers remind us that these diseases are almost entirely preventable, if only education, funding and personnel can be secured. HDAs were hardly the

only or even the perfect reformers working to improve access to safe sanitation, but their contribution was essential.

So, aside from helping people in need gain access to clean water and sanitation, what a WHO Director-General has called “Health 101,” what did their involvement in sanitation reforms mean for HDAs’ own longevity?⁶⁷ As I said at the chapter’s start, making that connection is not as simple as it was for a program like Food Preservation, or another health program like Nutrition. Nutrition, for example, always had been squarely within HDAs’ purview and expertise, and the program did not change dramatically, though it did evolve, over home extension’s ninety year tenure in Florida. But sanitation reforms transcended extension-only personnel, they were heavily concentrated in a relatively brief period, and they were not initially associated with female reformers, extension and otherwise. What makes sanitation’s impact on home demonstration’s durability evasive, however, implicitly tells us that the longevity issue is not related to a direct connection between HDAs’ choices and their endurance. Instead, it was what HDAs were doing and how they approached sanitation reforms that highlight the inherent strengths in home demonstration. Those strengths, in turn, promoted resilience.

Even when HDAs were not actively advertising their own involvement, choice and chance collided to reinforce home demonstration as collaborative and accessible. Extension personnel, both male and female and both white and black, cooperated in varying ways to craft a more unified approach to sanitation reform. Rather than relegating all privy construction to agriculture agent-led Rural Engineering and all screening to HDA-led Home Improvement, all manner of sanitation work drew the involvement of all extension workers. Beyond the Extension Service, agents cooperated with a host of agencies and organizations to advance the

⁶⁷ “Health 101” comes from Director-General Dr. Lee Jong-wook. Quote available at WHO’s site www.who.int/water_sanitation_health (15 August 2005).

sanitation cause. As these bodies came together, they each contributed something the others could not—more money, more infrastructure or, in the case of HDAs, more access.

Would hookworm and malaria have been brought under control without home demonstration's involvement in the campaigns against them? Probably, hindsight tells us. Other agencies had knowledge, they had educational tools and they had personnel. And if those had not been effective, the government still would have used their new “atomic bomb of the insect world,” DDT, to at least wipe out malaria.⁶⁸ But on the eve of World War II, HDAs brought to the work an unprecedented level of access and familiarity with local people and local conditions that eased sanitation reform into family discussions and accelerated the progress instigated by outside agencies. Duval County's black HDA, Ethel Powell, remarked in 1950, “The Extension Service has done much to improve rural health in the county, as it reaches people as no other organization does.”⁶⁹

Not all of what worked in favor of home demonstration was by choice, but by chance. As I noted, HDAs' work came along at just the right time. The confluence of other health agencies moving outward from the South and an international swell in health reform made the time ripe for HDAs' involvement. Being in the right place at the right time reinforced home demonstration's image as a timely, relevant and capable source of aid, education and advocacy. Just before and just after the sanitation work peaked in Florida, world wars created an ideal situation for HDAs to make themselves useful in other ways, including health. Indeed, health did not cease to be a concern for HDAs after hookworm and malaria came under control. Health work evolved to meet changing attitudes and new plagues—cancer, teen pregnancy, driving safety and obesity, among others, represented the new shape of home

⁶⁸ Humphreys, “Kicking a Dying Dog,” 12.

⁶⁹ Ethel Powell, Duval AR 1950 (NARA-33.6-55), 5.

demonstration health programs. Only polio, an epidemic in its own right, garnered the sort of action that characterized health reforms in the interwar period.

And HDAs still talked about sanitation with their clients, including privy construction, screening and water systems. This was particularly the case among black HDAs. In 1956, Volusia agent Ida Pemberton described her health work, including tuberculosis screening, nutrition and cooperation with the county health unit. Along with these newer emphases was a sudden interjection that called to mind health work from decades before. In the course of talking with families, Pemberton “discovered a few things [I] was not aware of concerning the water problem. Three families’ water supplies were condemned by the Health Department.” A real sense of urgency permeated Pemberton’s report as she continued: “Also, through the club meeting discussions of health problems, one family was reported not having any type of toilet. Now this family is being worked with in order to show them the danger they are in. Seven children are in this family.” Fortunately, these instances were increasingly rare among rural families, a benefit of HDAs’ continued vigilance. For example, by 1956, Hillsborough HDA Sudella Ford reported that approximately ninety percent of home demonstration families had both screened homes and safe water supplies.⁷⁰

In the late 1950s, work with another set of Floridians prompted HDAs to continue attention on basic sanitation. When home demonstration work began among Seminoles, assistant agent Edith Boehmer found that she had to backtrack somewhat to address sanitation needs. Though her work was more challenging as a result of language and cultural differences, and Boehmer’s response to those differences, she was able to emphasize the need for sanitary privies (or any privies), and the desirability of having running water.⁷¹ The

⁷⁰Ida Pemberton, Volusia AR 1956 (NARA-33.6-65), 8; Sudella Ford, Hillsborough AR 1953 (NARA-33.6-57), 12.

⁷¹Edith Boehmer, Seminole Indian AR 1956 (NARA-33.6-65), 6.

elimination of one disease did not mean that the need for cleanliness was eliminated, too. As I mentioned many pages ago in the Introduction, home demonstration had a longer shelf life than we might have expected partly because it was not all about one reform, one problem or one solution. Hookworm was a crisis, but sanitation was the bigger picture.

There were bigger pictures related to home demonstration's sanitation work, too. It was valuable in the immediate campaigns against disease, in promoting a more healthful environment overall, and in helping home demonstration maintain its relevancy. But there are related issues that do not necessarily define home demonstration's exact contribution to sanitation reform, but do relate to the state of rural health in general. Though home demonstration eventually worked with urban families to a significant degree, for most of its history it was committed to assisting rural families, all the more important because most reforms were devoted to urban areas. Historian Marilyn Holt has examined the disparity between rural and urban health conditions, and health care, in the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, rural American health "compared unfavorably with that of urban centers, particularly in access to medical aid and in reducing infant mortality." But the health gap did not draw particular attention. As a result, "the worst in urban life was put under a magnifying glass and great strides were made in bringing improvements, [but] rural communities were left alone to grapple with disease and death, pretty much as they had been from the time of settlement."⁷² Country Life-style interest had ebbed considerably, and many would-be rural reformers probably assumed that once Smith-Lever was in place, rural needs were being met adequately.

The disparity between rural and urban health did not end in the 1920s, or in the decades that followed. At the end of the twentieth century, equity debates carried on. For

⁷² Marilyn Holt, *Linoleum, Better Babies and the Modern Farm Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1995), 97, 98.

example, in an essay on equity in rural health care, Sam Cordes argues that health care concerns for rural Americans are justified, because research indicates that rural areas have greater health care needs, but fewer resources to meet those needs, than do urban areas. Part of the problem, according to Cordes, is that myths about rural America continue to influence policy-making and resource allocation. Even in 1920, as Marilyn Holt discusses, images of rural Americans as robustly healthy were false. Regardless, that image persisted for the rest of the century, despite dramatic changes in rural areas of the nation. Cordes identifies those myths that have had the most adverse affect on rural health care, including the notion that rural America is shrinking (in fact, as the American population has grown, so has the rural and nonmetro proportion of it), rural America is equated with farming (actually, fewer Americans farm than ever before), rural Americans live outside mainstream America and enjoy stable communities as a result, rural Americans are a homogenous people with homogenous needs, and rural Americans are overwhelmingly healthy and happy (in fact, homicide and suicide rates are high, driver safety is low, and a number of health disorders are more prevalent in rural areas than in urban ones).⁷³ Given the prevalence of misconception and a prevailing lack of interest in rural health over the last century, HDAs' access to rural families and interest in their health proved all the more vital. In no way was home demonstration equipped to meet all of rural Floridians' health needs, but being able to educate them about ways to help themselves allowed them to weather national neglect with more ease.

⁷³Sam M. Cordes, "Questions of Equity in Health Care and Other Amenities of the Countryside," in *Ethics and Agriculture* ed. Charles V. Blatz (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1991), 221, 222-228. See also Mary Gore Forrester, "Some Considerations of Justice in Rural Health Care Delivery," in *Ethics and Agriculture* ed. Charles V. Blatz (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1991), 232-240. On real diversity versus perceived homogeneity in rural health, see Tim Size, "Rural Minority Health: How Do We Respond to a Voice of Audacious and Unjustified Hope?" in *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 91 (1999): 27-29. On global disparities between rural and urban health care, including sanitation technology, see Cairncross' essay. According to WHO statistics, in 1970 fifty-four percent of urban versus nine percent of rural dwellers were served by sanitation facilities; by 1985, those percentages had reached fifty-nine and fifteen percent, respectively. Cairncross, 305.

Given its potential to influence rural health, and its practical contribution to the hookworm and malaria campaigns, what more might home demonstration have done, and where did it fall short? It is worth addressing the connection between poverty and sanitary deficiencies that worked in tandem to keep many Southerners ill and unproductive. Critics can rightly argue that home demonstration attacked sanitation without successfully attacking poverty. Like most contemporaries, home demonstration identified the connection between physical and economic vitality in the South, and like most contemporaries they focused on the immediate remedy (health) rather than the underlying malady (tenancy).⁷⁴ As I argued about other wider reform possibilities (suffrage, segregation, etc.), HDAs were neither equipped nor inclined to attack tenancy itself. But more so than in most other home demonstration programs, in sanitation and health HDAs actually could affect the impact of poverty and, to a lesser degree, poverty itself by concentrating on helping families regain their health.

And what about the efficacy of actual sanitation work? Like all home demonstration programs, sanitation was not perfect in its scope or administration. If sanitation had been a discrete phase of work, for instance, even more might have been accomplished, as was the case for other health programs. Or if all sanitation work had come under home demonstration, rather than being shared between agricultural and home demonstration, HDAs might have been able to influence more families to adopt sanitary measures like privies. But, all of that assumes too much—that on its own home demonstration had the time and resources to adopt a full-scale sanitation phase, and that it was free to make sanitation a phase at all. Not only might the USDA have determined that sanitation was not a suitable phase of work for women to tackle wholly on their own, female clients may not have felt inclined to make sanitation a

⁷⁴ For example, Margaret Humphreys notes of the DDT-based malaria eradication campaign of the early 1940s that “the technological innovation of DDT offered a powerful and economical new weapon to eradicate malaria once and for all—and without addressing the intractable problem of poverty.” Humphreys “Kicking a Dying Dog,” 2.

central project, and they ultimately decided what home demonstration would and would not focus on each year.

Moreover, making sanitation work solely home demonstration's would have negated the reality of how the work was carried out. More so than many other programs, sanitation was a whole-family affair. If the work was represented across the extension spectrum, it is more likely that extension workers could sell it to families who may not have cared for home demonstration, but trusted their agricultural agent, or had no need of an agricultural agent but was familiar with their HDA, or had no interest in adult extension, but had children in 4-H. Here again, both local and national agendas came to bear on what HDAs did and did not do. And we cannot rule out the likelihood that for at least some HDAs, sanitation work just was not as appealing as other phases, and they promoted it selectively. Perhaps some agreed with my colleague about sanitation being "gross."

However distasteful, sanitation details and technologies actually make a compelling argument for reform, in both concrete terms and some important intangible ones. For every ambiguous reform home demonstration undertook, for every lofty ideology it espoused, for every apparent discrepancy between theory and practice, there have been critical initiatives that have spoken much more clearly about what home demonstration "did." Health reforms are the most important of those initiatives. Reminding us once again that decent health continues to evade many people around the world, the WHO has boiled down the relationship between the practical and the intangible: "Sanitation and the means to practice hygienic behaviors yield direct benefits in terms of health, education and economic productivity. Lack of access to this most basic of needs is an assault against human dignity."⁷⁵

⁷⁵ "Securing Sanitation: The Compelling Case to Address the Crisis," www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications (10 July 2005).

Home demonstration was not the first, last, or only organization involved in health care or education. But it brought to the movement embedded workers with training, concern and access, and willingness to get down and dirty in some of the least pleasant topics they would address in their careers. Perhaps most important, agents could make reform seem safe and desirable by building on personal, trusted relationships with families who were far removed from, and often wary of, the authors of sundry pamphlets and official reports, many of whom blamed the sufferers for their illness. The combination of these factors with HDAs' larger reform mission gave them unique access to rural families and perpetuated home demonstration's own relevance as a reform mechanism.

Sanitation took home demonstration into a world outside its own borders. HDAs worked cooperatively with a number of other agencies and movements, so that home demonstration's story in sanitation is deeply integrated with the others'. Other reforms HDAs undertook also drew them into a wider world of activism, especially after World War II. By reaching out to new people, like Puerto Ricans, and embracing new themes, like Cold War nationalism, home demonstration continued to re-invent itself in order to ward off obsolescence and continue its core work. As the twentieth century progressed, home demonstration became ever less distinct and ever more integrated into the broader reform and education world. Ultimately, this became cause for concern among traditionalists, but it also helped ensure that home extension had something to offer.

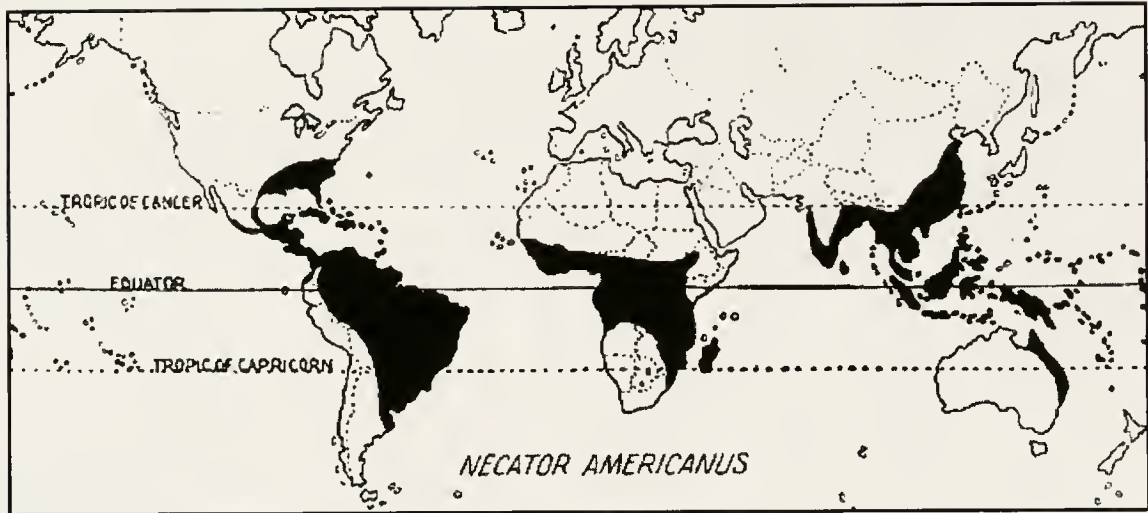


Figure 5-1. Map illustrating those areas prone to hookworm. Ironically, the "American killer" proved not to be solely American. Source: "The Importance of Wearing Shoes," *Mississippi History Now* http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/features/feature31/hookworm_world.html (August 22, 2005).



Figure 5-2. Pictures like this are common in historical discussions of hookworm. The little girl is eleven years old and weighs but thirty-two pounds. In the second photo, the boy on the left is a healthy fourteen year old. His companion suffers from hookworm; he is sixteen years old and has a seriously diminished mental age. Source: ?; Edward H. Beardsley, *A History of Neglect: Health Care for Blacks and Mill Workers in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 50.



Figure 5-3. Four children of J. D. Tillman, Leon County, Florida, July 1, 1931. Each suffers from hookworm, and the photo has been marked with the children's age and weight: "L-R: LeRoy Tillman (age 8, 41 lbs), George (age 12, 61 lbs), Joseph (age 15, 67 lbs), Mildred (age 16, 72 lbs)". Source: Florida Photographic Collection. Florida State Library and Archives.

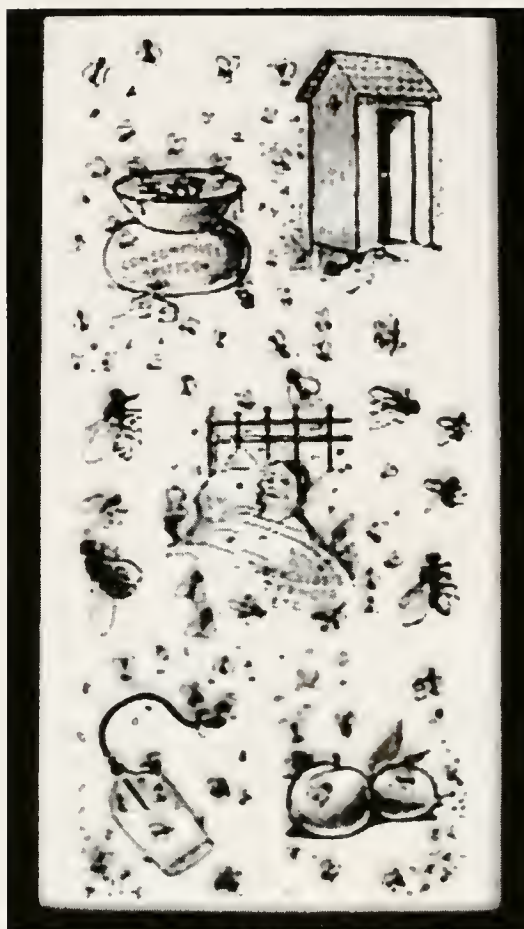
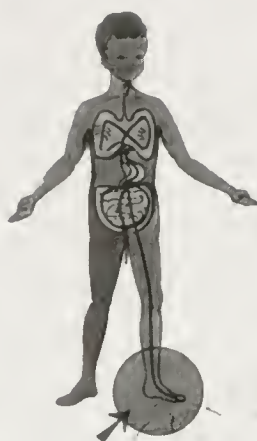


Figure 5-4. A "Filthy Fly" poster produced by the State Board of Health and used by HDAs and other reformers to demonstrate the dangers of allowing flies to run amok in and around the home. Source: Ronald Barlow, *The Vanishing American Outhouse* (El Cajon, CA: Windmill Publishing, 1989), 105.



Diela marche pieds nus dans la boue

Andrew walks barefoot in the mud.



Les vers donnent la toux et mangent le sang.

and



Diela a mal au ventre, il a la diarrhée.

Andrew has stomach ache and diarrhea.



**Diela prend le vermifuge
pour tuer les vers.**

Andrew takes worm medicine to kill the worms.



Toute la famille utilise un bon cabinet.

The whole family uses a good toilet.



La famille retrouve le bonheur.

The family is happy again.

Figure 5-5. This is part of a series of slides designed to educate children and their families about preventing hookworm. This set comes from the modern Democratic Republic of the Congo, but children in the interwar South were given similar pamphlets to teach them what caused hookworm and how they could get—and stay—better. In both cases the linchpin was the same: shoes and privies. Source: WHO Hookworm Slides at http://www.who.int/wormcontrol/education_materials/congo/en/eng_french_hookwormslides.pdf (15 August 2005).



Figure 5-6. These depictions of the typical privy are designed to indicate the dangers of privies that did not meet sanitary standards. Source: U. S. Department of Agriculture, "Sewage and Sewerage of Farm Homes," Bulletin 1227, in Ronald Barlow, *The Vanishing American Outhouse* (El Cajon, CA: Windmill Publishing, 1989).



Figure 5-7. These photos document the construction of sanitary pit privies in Tampa, Florida as part of a 1935 FERA project. This project was likely for urban residents or a labor camp. Source: Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Library and Archives.



Figure 5-8. These privies are the only ones of their kind still standing in their respective counties. The privy on the left, photographed in 1994, was built by the WPA in Orange County. The privy on the right, photographed in 1985, was built by FERA in the 1940s on the Funston Mann farm, Baker County, Florida. Source: Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Library and Archives.



Figure 5-9. Woman going into her outhouse in Bristol, Florida, 1953. Source: Red (Benjamin) Kerce, Florida Photographic Collection, Florida State Library and Archives.

CHAPTER 6
NEW WORLDS FOR OLD: HOME DEMONSTRATION
IN POST-WAR FLORIDA



Figure 6-1. Source: Joselina Y. Irizarry, "Ten Years of Home Demonstration Work in Puerto Rico" (M.A. thesis, Florida State College for Women, 1945), 181.

Joselina Irizarry, one of Puerto Rico's first six HDAs, included in her thesis this apparently unassuming photo of a Puerto Rican home demonstration woman. Though the scene, depicting improved home making practices, is common to many HDA-generated photographs, the photo is nevertheless striking: the painting on the wall is Jean Francois Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857), widely considered by art and social historians to be an archetypal representation of rural women. It can hardly be coincidental that it hangs in the home of a rural Puerto Rican woman in 1945, for this reproduction conveys a singular vision

of rural women. The juxtaposition in Irizarry's photo of women separated by a century and an ocean says much about how home demonstration saw rural women and the sense of heritage HDAs assumed for themselves and believed they could impart to rural women to enhance their own sense of purpose. But this homemaker is someone new to the home demonstration milieu. The Puerto Rican woman is an important link between the heyday of home demonstration reforms—those that captured the determined spirit of its reform and education programs—and the newer home demonstration that was more profession than reform. Home demonstration's expansion into Puerto Rico was a progressive move by the USDA, begun in 1934, that took home demonstration into new areas while maintaining its core commitment to fundamental reforms. But the expansion preceded a major shift in HDAs' relationship to both reforms and clients following World War II. On the surface, that should not surprise us—home demonstration had been changing since it started, usually with beneficial results for crucial reforms like food preservation and sanitation, and for agents' own careers. In this new context, HDAs continued to skillfully adjust home demonstration's programs and mission, particularly by diversifying their client base and significantly widening their program curriculum. But the results were more complex. Though change allowed home demonstration to remain viable between 1945 and 1960, the nature of the changes compromised home demonstration's potential for in-depth, fundamental reforms. Endurance began to take its toll.

Indeed, HDAs faced arguably greater challenges to their efficacy and relevance after the Second World War than any time before it. Rapid and spreading urbanization continued to shrink the pool of traditional clientele, and the corresponding demand for rural reforms; the combined effect of domestication and diversification in women's lives likewise decreased the number of women seeking home economics degrees and those turning to home demonstration as a career option; the priority issues of the day increasingly had less to do with "every-day-

good-housekeeping”, the bread and butter of home demonstration. The decades following World War II brought not only changes unlike those HDAs had faced before, but saw agents responding differently, as well. Whereas HDAs earlier had made adjustments *within* their existing programs, after 1945 they moved and adjusted *beyond* familiar programs. The evidence suggests that HDAs had abandoned rural rejuvenation as their primary reform agenda, and instead were focused upon reshaping home demonstration for the rest of the twentieth century; all sources indicate that HDAs were fashioning a program that was sleek, modern, inclusive and expansive. To do this, HDAs created or experienced three major shifts in the post-war world. First, they embraced, in a variety of ways, the internationalism of the Cold War era. Second, HDAs undertook or underwent significant changes in their professional world. And third, HDAs assumed a more diverse educational role. In each instance, context was once again the defining element in home demonstration’s evolution.

One of the most critical contexts in which HDAs found themselves after World War II was a new Florida. For reformers charged with improving rural life, even reformers who had been embracing urban families for some time, Florida was hardly an ideal location. Though Florida’s entire population was growing steadily, by 1960 it was primarily urban, and that population was growing at a far greater rate than its rural counterpart. Between 1960 and 1970, for example, the urban population increased more than 49 percent, but the rural population increased by only about 2 percent. Furthermore, the greatest population surge was in small towns between 2,500 (the top margin for rural areas) and 25,000 people, and in large metropolitan areas of 100,000 or more. In 1920, Florida’s rural people made up 63.5 percent of its population, and its urban people 36.5 percent. In 1970, the proportion was 80.5 percent

and 19.5 percent—in favor of urban folks.¹ Certain counties experienced growth in unique ways. For example, Escambia County's population swelled, but it was concentrated in the southern half nearest Pensacola and Pensacola Naval Air Station, while the northern, rural part of the county stalled. Farming decreased and the rural population became a minority. Dade County's growth also was due, in part, to defense expansion. A major challenge facing the county became the dramatic increase in school children and the need for more and larger schools. HDA Eunice Grady remarked that 4-H felt the effects of school population pressure because it lost its space for meetings.

Perhaps the most unique growth spurt happened in Brevard County, where the population skyrocketed—literally. In 1962, the state Annual Report devoted a three-page piece to the impact of the Space Age on the small agricultural county. Brevard experienced the industrialization, population increase, demographic shifts, rural slowdowns, and school pressures of other counties, but to an extreme. By 1960, Brevard's school enrollment was more than the total county population had been a decade before. In ten years, the population increased 371 percent, the median age of residents dropped to less than twenty-seven, the number of schools rose from eight to forty-five, and the total county expenditure rose nearly 500 percent. As the article put it, "One can easily see that while the population has soared and the rockets roared, taxes, land prices, and the general cost of living have soared proportionately."² The combination of rising populations, urbanization, industrialization, and demographic shifts meant that, though many of the principles associated with home demonstration remained applicable, HDAs could no longer tout themselves as purely rural

¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population: 1970. Volume I, Chapter A. Number of Inhabitants. Final Report PC (1)-A11 Florida* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 4-5, 7.

² Ethel Atkinson, Escambia AR 1951 (NARA-33.6-*), 2-4; Eunice Grady, Dade AR 1951 (NARA-33.6-52), 23; *Resource Development: Florida Agricultural Extension Service Annual Report* (Gainesville: Florida Agricultural Extension Service, 1963), 3-5.

educators and expect to receive support. And they could not rely on a tactic of incorporating urban families into existing programs like food preservation. New strategies were necessary if home demonstration was going to remain viable in the post-war era.

HDAs started thinking further outside the home demonstration box than they ever had before. The program did not abandon the basics, but it did adopt, even embrace, an aggressive new approach to its relationship with Floridians. Early signs of this strategy, an activist international mindset, appeared on the eve of war, and rapidly matured during and after it. Activism took a number of forms that varied in sophistication and significance. In some cases, home demonstration women simply held abstract discussions regarding war and peace. In others, they took to expanding their own global education via International Affairs programs, including guest lectures by visiting international students, dinners built around international foods, and skits demonstrating foreign dress and mannerisms. They often turned a new empathy with the world's (democratic) poor into CARE packages and relief drives. Many home demonstration women made citizenship and preparedness part of their agenda, matter-of-factly discussing ways to survive nuclear holocaust. The most significant internationalization efforts were those in which Florida's home demonstration literally reached out to other rural women around the world, most notably when the USDA established home demonstration work in Puerto Rico, a process begun in 1934. In each case, the point is not really whether these activities "did" anything; it is unlikely that home demonstration women's local relief drives saved thousands of children or that their self-education in international ways qualified them to become ambassadors.

The point is, in fact, that in a time of considerable uncertainty and real fear, Florida women did not react as we might expect. Post-war political events, particularly the growth of communism, might as easily have pushed Florida women toward a xenophobic, but

comfortable, insularity. Even more to the point, HDAs could have urged a return to normalcy, to the familiar days of canning and privies. But such an approach was neither practical nor beneficial. Once again, the clearest evidence that women were interested in the wider world comes from the programs that took an international turn—like all home demonstration programs, the women had helped create them. Home demonstration encouraged this effort to try to understand and participate in the wider world, making internationalism in various forms an everyday component of enhanced living. It was, perhaps, the most significant step in home demonstration's evolution, securing its relevance in a new world by becoming a part of it. In the broadest sense, home demonstration was not just co-opting world news for its meetings so women in Florida could fight Soviet communism. Home demonstration's shift to include something beyond practical education for everyday-good-housekeeping indicates that it was an organization capable of outlasting its initial reform agenda.

What is more, home demonstration was entrenching women, urban and rural, into a larger national movement of female Cold War activism. A number of historians, including Susan Ware, Joanne Meyerowitz, Elaine Tyler May, and Helen Laville have argued that the "happy housewife" image Betty Freidan "exposed" and American advertisers perpetuated was just that—an image. Many American women in the 1950s indeed were homemakers and domestically inclined. But their sense of domestic duty was larger than cooking the perfect pot roast. Women were interested in creating private and public homes that were safe havens for democracy and international peace. Their standards might have been based on American ideals, but they were far from introverted in either their reflections or their actions. Indeed, women felt little sense of conflict between activism and domesticity, for they saw them as mutually reinforcing. Laville points out, though, that historians re-examining women's Cold War mindsets and activities still do so in the context of the private and public domesticity.

That is, they do not assess how these women adopted Cold War internationalism, except to discuss American women casting themselves and being cast by others as symbols of democratic superiority. Though Laville is wary of identifying an international sisterhood among women, she does firmly place American women in the context of international activism.³

One of the key venues for women's entrance into Cold War activism was voluntary associations. Though Laville identifies more traditional, and politically astute, associations like the league of Women Voters, the YWCA and the International Federation of University Women as examples of internationalism among Cold War women, her argument that women's voluntary associations served as "a bridge between pre-war progressive activities of women reformers and the involvement of women civil rights, anti-war and feminist movements in the 1960s" rings true for home demonstration. Indeed, home demonstration's professional roots reach back to Ellen Richard's home economics, a cadre of women drawn from suffragettes and other activists. Indeed, Martha Van Rensselaer, the woman who founded Cornell University's home economics college, the first of its kind, was herself named one of the twelve greatest women in America by the League of Women Voters in 1923.⁴ Both home demonstration's activist reformer roots and its unassuming domestic style place it within Laville's concept of Cold War activism. She argues that voluntary associations gave women non-suspect access to politics and a wider world because associations avoided "a direct challenge to cultural tropes which placed women within the domestic and outside the political sphere." Finally, voluntary associations provided women with a context for acting on a

³ Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women's Organisations* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester, 2002), 3-5, 8.

⁴ Alison Schneider, "It's Not Your Mother's Home Economics," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* October 13, 2000 (<http://chronicle.com/free/v47/i07/07a01801.html>) (17 October 2000).

service ideal appealing for both its ethical satisfaction and practical entrance to male-dominated concerns.⁵

Though home demonstration women are not part of any Cold War analyses so far, their activities place them squarely within that context. Their experiences, though, were not those of their sisters joining politics, but much more akin to what Elaine Tyler May describes as a domestic revival. Certainly, home demonstration women had not fled from domesticity, but May identifies a confluence of Cold War culture and domesticity as evidence of Americans' reliance on family as a "psychological fortress." May's analysis reflects what HDAs had been arguing for decades: the Cold War (or Depression, or world war) family, "bolstered by scientific expertise and wholesome abundance . . . might ward off the hazards of the age."⁶ Home demonstration women combined their organizational experience, scientific domesticity, and global concerns into a distinct form of activism intended to boost both domestic security and make sense of international tensions.

Particular strategies for digesting a new world order began with those women in the State Council. As the body established to steer the course of home demonstration in Florida, the State Council, made up of local women with HDA advisors, was in a unique position to speak out about and plan for post-war needs, both practical and philosophical. Florida women's experience with war alerted them to the need for mental as well as practical preparedness. Fresh uncertainty regarding world events, new bodies like the United Nations and Soviet Union, and disconcerting alerts about bomb shelters and communism provided home demonstration with an opportunity to continue expanding its clientele, and its purpose, by offering means toward making sense of the onslaught of information circulating in

⁵ Laville, *Cold War Women*, 12, 15.

⁶ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988), 10-11.

American news. Home demonstration efforts in food conservation could not have surprised many people familiar with extension's history, but a departure into current events education proved that home demonstration was comfortable developing new roles and discussing new issues—and shrewd enough to capitalize on new circumstances.

Despite the outward gaiety of the 1950s, home demonstration women apparently kept abreast of the world's political upheavals, and incorporated what they saw as solutions into the existing roster of committees and programs. Quoting a past president of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), the 1953-1954 Council declared “the four walls of the home no longer represent the full responsibilities of a country woman's life, and that she now knows she must do some community housekeeping for the sake of the home itself.”⁷ Alert to Floridians' sense of impending Cold War crisis, home demonstration emphasized citizenship as part of its regular program. Naturally, there were discussions of democracy and understanding of how government works; the 1951-1952 International Relations committee of the State Council made a study of the “differences between communism, fascism and democracy” and encouraged each club to do the same.

Beyond discussing the spirit of democracy, HDAs also encouraged women to do something that had not come up overtly in home demonstration to that point—vote. The 1918 War College for Women had included discussions of suffrage, but since 1920, voting had not been an explicit topic for discussion. In the 1950s, citizenship committees deemed it necessary to “interest women in assuming their responsibilities as informed citizens,” and they actively encouraged women to exercise their rights and become active in organizations like the League of Women Voters. It is worth noting that the Councils were predominantly white, and that discussions of the vote as related to black women did not surface (though they might have

⁷ “Home Demonstration Council Report, 1953-54,” Florida Cooperative Extension Service. Home Demonstration Records, 1912-1986 (SC-158-2).

been taking place privately). Moreover, black HDAs' reports indicate that, again on the surface, suffrage was not discussed. Democracy was not controversial; black enfranchisement presumably was.⁸

Other responsibilities, too, became intertwined with citizenship. Amidst the talk of world peace and tolerance were the very real threats of the worst case scenario, and home demonstration women utilized their existing club-style organization and method demonstration techniques to add bomb shelters, home nursing, and plane spotting in the Ground Observers Corp to an already full curriculum. Civil defense programs relied on home demonstration as a means to encourage women to remain alert and prepared. Broward County women participated in the nation-wide "Operation Alert" following a mock bomb attack. Orange County, "in a strategic area," took Civil Defense to heart and 150 home demonstration women there completed a Basic Civil Defense Training Course, followed by courses to train them for specific emergency action. Suwannee County made provision for disaster by taking on a role as headquarters for a tri-county disaster area, converting its coliseum into a storage area and 130-bed hospital.⁹

Despite the fear of a nuclear attack, HDAs reminded families that Civil Defense was preparation for any disaster, including those likely in a state surrounded by warm tropical waters. Brevard County home demonstration handed out to its members an Emergency Food poster to provide guidance in preparing for any disaster, "man-made or natural." The 1958-1959 Council committee on Civil Defense conducted a workshop focused on preparedness for

⁸ "Council Report, 1951-52;" "Home Demonstration Council Report, 1950-51." Florida Cooperative Extension Service. Home Demonstration Records, 1912-1986. (SC-158-2), 52.

⁹ "Council Report, 1953-54," 58; "Council Report, 1952-53," 61; "Council Report, 1956-57;" "Council Report, 1959-60," 97.

multiple scenarios, including “hurricane, devastating fire, tornado, explosion or possibly atomic attack.”¹⁰

Post-war need also gave home demonstration women and their neighbors an occasion to forge traditional skills and new insight into practical activism. To build empathy for women beyond American shores, and highlight the value of American extension to American women, International Affairs work also included foreign aid programs of varying degrees of commitment. Particular attention was devoted to “distressed peoples overseas.” At their 1946 Short Course, 4-H girls collected clothing and canned hundreds of containers of food for sending to these distressed folks, and in 1947, individual counties launched efforts to feed the hungry with food drives. Hardee County men and women canned and donated “a solid carload of beef and vegetables to the starving people of Europe” as part of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. (See Figure 6-2).¹¹

Home demonstration’s new international activism was not oriented solely to immediate relief. Extension’s specific role in planting and harvesting democracy was articulated by the University of Florida’s Provost for Agriculture, J. Wayne Reitz. His speech, “America’s Role in the Development of Foreign Agriculture,” proved enlightening to councilwomen in attendance, who recalled, “he showed us wherein building a better world certainly must start with the individual and what we can contribute in the areas where there is

¹⁰ “Council Report, 1958-59,” 58, 109; “Council Report, 1957-58,” 66. The emphasis on natural disaster was wise, given the preponderance of hurricanes in Florida’s history. Between 1914 and 1960, thirty-eight hurricanes affected Florida, including the devastating 1928 Lake Okeechobee hurricane and the 1935 Labor Day hurricane. In the aftermath of the 1928 storm, the Red Cross noted its grateful acceptance of home demonstration aid in distributing vegetable seeds for families trying to regroup after the storm. American National Red Cross, *The West Indies Hurricane Disaster, September 1928. The Official Report of Relief Work in Porto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Florida* (Washington, D.C.: American National Red Cross, 1929), 73.

¹¹ *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1946* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 54; *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1947* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1948), 62.

poverty, sickness and illiteracy.” Echoing the hope of the Marshall Plan, Reitz called for sending out agricultural and home demonstration missionaries, but “only where we are invited.” “By these means,” he predicted, “we hope we can help overcome communism.”¹²

Home demonstration women’s efforts perhaps were unsophisticated, but they accompanied other, more far-reaching movements. The Senior Council took an important step by officially joining the ACWW and Country Woman’s Council (CWC) in 1952.

Membership involved home demonstration women in an international body devoted to reform for rural women, and it allowed them the opportunity to travel well beyond their borders and meet women like themselves hailing from around the world. The first triennial conference that Florida home demonstration delegates attended was in Toronto, followed by another in Ceylon. By 1953, the Council had established a formal committee on the ACWW and the CWC, with a primary goal of maintaining contact between themselves and other members around the world.¹³ Not only did Florida women involve themselves in national and global concerns, but extension itself expanded its borders.

In fact, home demonstration’s most significant expansion began well before World War II with the establishment of home demonstration in Puerto Rico. Assistant State HDA Mary Keown arrived on the island in July 1934 after spending time preparing for her mission with extension administration in Washington, D.C. Agricultural extension work was already underway in Puerto Rico, so Keown joined its director, Dr. M. F. Barrus, to become the

¹² With the same expectation in mind, home demonstration foreign aid took many other forms, including UNESCO coupons, CARE packages, and Pennies for Friendship (to provide funds for the ACWW). In 1954, Leon County club members tackled a variety of aid ideas, including donations to the United Nations Appeal for Children, to which churches sent clothing, soap, needles, pins, tape, crochet thread and other necessities to Korea. Children participated by collecting these articles from neighbors on Halloween, rather than their usual Trick-or-Treats. “Council Report, 1954-55,” 27; “Council Report, 1950-51,” 12.

¹³ “Council Report, 1952-53;” “Council Report, 1955-56,” 33; “Council Report, 1953-54,” 39.

Assistant Director of the Agricultural Extension Service there.¹⁴ In late November, Keown sent home to Florida her first report on the development of Puerto Rican home demonstration. Her experiences there shed light on the familiar blend of steadfast attention to what worked and equal attention to what had to be different. Home demonstration always had maintained a policy of local-need determinism, but the language and cultural differences in Puerto Rico demanded the most diplomatic approach possible.

From the first, Keown and her colleagues strove to curry favor among their new neighbors, working to gain trust before bombarding them with a wave of recommendations. Aware of her initial status as a newcomer, Keown sought advice on customs from University of Puerto Rico faculty, such as Maria T. Orcasitas, the head of the Home Economics department. Keown was alert to cultural differences, and took them into account when planning home demonstration work. For example, selecting the first HDAs proved difficult for several reasons. Keown hoped to hire women who were old enough to demonstrate maturity and experience, but not yet so old “as to have grown adamant.” Furthermore, she looked to women who seemed the least likely to shock Puerto Ricans who were unaccustomed to women traveling about alone or working in public positions.

¹⁴ Smith-Lever’s allotments for extension extended to Puerto Rico in 1931, via Senate Act 5524. However, political difficulties on the island had stalled funding procedures for home demonstration work. In response, a number of University of Puerto Rico officials and faculty, with the aid of some legislators, lobbied for home demonstration work. Finally, by the summer of 1933, legislation providing local funds to match federal ones was passed. See Irizarry, 10-11. I am still searching for information about the timing of the Smith-Lever extension, and why Keown was chosen for the position. Very little information, especially in English, is available regarding the establishment of Puerto Rican extension, but I *suspect* that logistics had much to do with the decision to send a Florida agent to Puerto Rico. Indeed, in the succeeding years, Puerto Rico extension appears to have become regarded as part of a larger southeastern extension district. An in-service training workshop held at University of Florida in 1948 included South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Puerto Rico. The connection between Florida and Puerto Rico was particularly pronounced. In fact, a similar workshop held almost the same week in Georgia included only South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Compare *The Extension Specialist. Report of Workshop at University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida March 22-April 2, 1948* and *Extension Specialists: Workshop Report, March 25-April 6, 1948 Athens, Georgia*. In later years, Puerto Rico continued to be represented at Southern extension workshops, often held in Texas rather than Florida.

Even more so than in the rural United States, men's approval and willingness to participate was vital. Early meetings to explain home demonstration's purpose were attended solely by men, who explained that their wives belonged at home, too busy to be out socializing. As one of the first HDAs explained a decade later, "the Puerto Rican native rural man is the recognized ruler of the household and is jealous as a husband, but at the same time he is intelligent, hospitable, respectful, and cooperative when he realizes the value of any movement which aims to improve rural family life."¹⁵ With that in mind, to assure residents that home demonstration had some tangible benefit for them, Keown and others were careful to orient their frequent publicity toward what extension could do and how it worked, but avoided naming specific developments until they could offer something concrete.¹⁶

The joint efforts of Keown and local HDAs paid off, for Puerto Rican families responded enthusiastically to extension overtures. Keown decided that beginning with individual women and children was preferable to trying to start clubs right away, but it was not long before women themselves requested club work. Having learned a valuable lesson in how reform moved through communities, Keown and the home demonstration team began club organization among children, organizing *Clubes 4-H* and translating the 4-H motto into Spanish. Once children's work had been officially accepted, home demonstration turned to adult women and helped them form *Clubes de Demonstracion del Hogar*.¹⁷

¹⁵ Mary Keown, "Home Demonstration Work in Puerto Rico," 1934 Annual Report (SC-21-7). Joselina Irizarry wryly responds to Puerto Rican men's argument about their wives' busy schedule, "It was true that being in charge of a family of six or eight, and being absolutely responsible for all the household jobs without any help from other family members and with the least convenient working facilities, would keep a homemaker busy. However, the men were exploring the field before allowing their wives to go to meetings." Irizarry, "Ten Years of Home Demonstration Work in Puerto Rico," (M.A. thesis, Florida State College for Women, 1945), 21-22.

¹⁶ Keown, Annual Report, 28.

¹⁷ Irizarry, "Ten Years of Home Demonstration Work," 22.

The new home demonstration team also made every effort to adjust to life on the island, rather than superimposing every-day America upon it. Because the majority of residents spoke Spanish, Keown learned to read it and all publicity and bulletins were printed in Spanish.¹⁸ As Florida home demonstration had learned, communities with a strong religious life needed, and home demonstration benefited from, a close association with local clergy. As a result of early HDAs' efforts to seriously include Church dignitaries in extension plans, the Church remained a consistent supporter of home demonstration work, providing space for meetings, addressing congregations about food production and conservation and contributing labor to building and relief projects. In order to continue building confidence, every new HDA was a Puerto Rican, not an imported American. The effect of this decision was profound in two ways. Home demonstration had always attempted to match communities with a like-minded agent to facilitate reform; the same was true in Puerto Rico. Additionally, Puerto Rican agents, some of whom had been raised in cities and had been educated in the United States or Europe, brought a remarkable enthusiasm to their work in that they seemed to connect with their own homeland. Sofia Brenes, a first-time agent in 1934, wrote, "I don't like to write reports, but I am so well influenced with the Agricultural agent's cooperation, the beautiful country, delighted conversations of the housewives, the ideas that are behind these people and the reason that I came, that I couldn't help to write this time."¹⁹

Even as a newcomer, Keown approached her work with a willingness to learn that allowed her to develop an affection for the island, enhancing her work there and helping to

¹⁸ Such a move was wise; Joan Jensen has studied the impact of HDAs who were willing to learn and work within the customs of their clients, including speaking their language, as opposed to those who treated all clients as a uniform group. Jensen's conclusion are not surprising: adaptable, respectful HDAs made significant progress in their reforms, those less accommodating found their work seriously hindered. See Joan Jensen, "Crossing Ethnic Barriers in the Southwest: Women's Agricultural Extension Education, 1914-1940," *Agricultural History* 60 (Spring 1986): 169-181.

¹⁹ Keown, Annual Report, 19.

facilitate its growth. Though A. P. Spencer referred to Puerto Ricans as “those natives,” Keown’s letters indicate her growing comfort working in Puerto Rico and her desire to stay on as long as possible. “I don’t know exactly what I expected,” she wrote in an open letter to Florida extension agents, “but it was a surprise to find a University with an enrollment of more than 3,000 students, and to travel over mountains 4,000 feet high, covered with tropical growth.” Keown seemed both surprised and delighted by the differences in landscape and people. The island’s mountainous terrain came to represent a sort of alteration in Keown herself: “Such crooked, narrow and steep roads make traveling quite different than we find it in Florida, and I am not at all sure my Ford can keep to the straight and narrow path after its experiences here.”²⁰

The pleasant surprises Puerto Rico offered Keown reinforced the pleasing rate at which home demonstration work there matured, a clear sign that Keown’s attitude and policies were working. In late November 1934, she wrote Spencer of some particularly promising developments under way, including the rapid increase in the number of HDAs. The home demonstration ranks grew from six original agents in 1934 to eleven in 1935. By 1944, the number of HDAs had risen to thirty-three. These numbers only include regular HDAs, not emergency agents, special agents or assistants. Depending on the situation, the overall ranks might swell temporarily with agents hired for a specific purpose, such as canning. In 1940, regular and assistant HDAs were joined by eleven canning assistants, appointed by the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration.²¹

Keown’s own enthusiasm for the work also was evident when she wrote Director Newell in May 1935 seeking an extension for her leave of absence. Florida administrators felt

²⁰ APS to Mary Keown, 18 September, 1934; Mary Keown to All Extension Agents in Florida, 2 November 1934 (SC-21-7).

²¹ Irizarry, “Ten Years of Home Demonstration Work,” 157-171.

Keown had fulfilled her obligation to Puerto Rico, but her own correspondence indicates that work there was not a temporary priority for her. “Needless to say,” she told Newell, “I am interested in my work here, and it has been an invaluable professional experience for me, as well as a pleasant one, personally, for I have developed a real affection for the people here who have been exceedingly kind to me.”²² We saw earlier that the issue of an extension for Keown revealed a power struggle between administrators and agents. We see here, too, that work begun beyond familiar surroundings could be a powerful re-invigoration for the reform mission. Crucial to the issue of extension longevity, Keown’s experiences in Puerto Rico tell us that transborder reform built new communities—refreshing the reform agenda, creating a new cache of clientele and expanding the ultimate utility of home demonstration itself. In the grand scheme of extension education, extending extension into Puerto Rico directly situated home demonstration in a global reform context.

Their experience in Puerto Rico convinced American extensionists that it was possible, even desirable, to expand their work and influence beyond American shores. But Puerto Ricans also had taught Americans an important lesson: American extension was not the only extension. In 1945, Joselina Irizarry, the inaugural HDA who created that potent photograph, evaluated how the experience of starting fresh a program of such scale might impact the extension of home demonstration elsewhere. Most importantly, she recommends that all subsequent programs follow the procedure that worked so well on the island, “of soliciting advice, cooperation, and good will of agencies and individuals locally.”²³ Particularly after World War II, American extensionists had ample opportunity to apply Irizarry’s advice and the lessons of their own experience.

²² Mary Keown to WN, 22 May 1935. SC-21-7.

²³ Irizarry, “Ten Years of Home Demonstration Work,” 147.

Indeed, as American-style extension spread around the world, it took on a new shape to meet the needs of a whole new range of clients. The initial impetus for global extension had been to emulate the Marshall Plan's reform-for-peace program. Over time, the impetus for extension became more simply humanitarian, but more politically and socially complex. For example, in 1972, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations issued an Extension manual for American workers moving into new areas of the world. The manual's author, Addison Maunder, noted that extension traditionally had been "limited mainly to the more highly developed countries." The manual made clear that the time was ripe for extended extension, but that workers had to be alert to the ways that these new areas differed from those to which extension was accustomed. New nations with large rural populations, food shortages combined with population booms, and a new "philosophy of government [that] changed from one of exploitation of the masses of rural people to one of recognition of a responsibility for their welfare." These changes prompted a demand for "a variety of rural services and institutions, including agricultural extension services."²⁴

As had been the case with successful American extension, new global extension acknowledged the need for sensitivity to local circumstance. "Although the basic principles of extension education have gained acceptance throughout the world," Maunder cautioned, "their application in effective programs must necessarily vary with the circumstances in each country and with the situation in each local community." Maunder noted, for instance, that the traditional extension organization might not be appropriate given a country's governmental structure, and that traditional methods of organizing and carrying out extension work might not suit a community's social mores.²⁵ Certainly that had been the case in Puerto Rico, where

²⁴ Addison Maunder, *Agricultural Extension: A Reference Manual* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1972), xi.

²⁵ Maunder, *Agricultural Extension*, xi.

Mary Keown and her team had recognized differences and adapted extension to fit them. The move toward expanding what home demonstration women believed they could and should be doing in a wider world context was both shrewd and beneficial for agents and clients alike, but HDAs were finding that a new world order was developing within their own ranks, as well.

The second post-war strategy HDAs employed to weather upheaval was to re-orient themselves from reform women to career women. Though HDAs had always been on the job, the context of their work was still decidedly reformist. The attempt to reinvent home demonstration, however, proved more difficult than anyone involved may have imagined. Furthermore, the tensions that erupted in the process were detrimental to both the work and the career. The first problem was in securing personnel. By the early 1950s, state HDAs had begun lamenting the shortage of qualified and willing women to serve as agents. The prime culprit was the decrease in the numbers of college women majoring in and graduating with home economics degrees. In the 1950s, more women were abandoning college plans to marry, and by the 1960s, ideas about women and the home changed rapidly in the wake of feminism. Home demonstration was hard hit on both accounts—women interested in homemaking were not interested in doing so professionally, and women critical of homemaking regarded home extension and home economics as the enemy. To lure the remaining pools of candidates, extension worked for pay increases, improved benefits, and greater opportunities for professional development—in short, emphasizing home demonstration as a career, rather than a movement.

The career reformer image is evident in the brochures designed to attract women to home demonstration work. The pamphlets emphasized a HDA's personal skills, intelligence, education and training, and remarked upon the rewards an agent might expect, including both meaningful work and a competitive salary. The home demonstration agent outlined in 1950s

recruitment literature suggests a woman somewhere between Betty Crocker and Betty Freidan—industrious, attractive, personable, capable and independent.

Certainly, the image of the home demonstration agent was an appealing one, but it did not necessarily work to attract significant numbers of new women into home demonstration work. As I outline in the Epilogue, in the feminist climate of the 1960s, professional home economics was still home economics, and HDAs found they could not move forward with respect. Increasingly visible ties to home economics tended to discredit even the meatiest reforms in which home extension was still engaged. Part of the problem, to be sure, was that those early efforts were eclipsed more and more by those that often traded grit for glam.

More so after World War II than any time before, home demonstration involved itself with non-traditional topics, the third strategy for post-war relevance. Though the phases of work we associate with home demonstration, such as food preservation, consumer education, and health, remained, HDAs, EHEs and FCSAs all significantly expanded their conception of what was appropriate for them to address. Though HDAs primarily focused their expansion on Cold War internationalism and citizenship, their successors turned their attention to more domestic matters that had less to do with rural revitalization and more to do with social reform. To some extent, working outside the borders of traditional home demonstration phases was not unprecedented. The challenges beyond the “every-day-good-housekeeping” that defined the bulk of home demonstration work were not unique to post-war Florida. Indeed, HDAs had been grappling with a variety of crises since the start of their work in the state, including the 1918 influenza pandemic, the food shortages and conservation calls of both world wars, and the economic strain of the Depression, not to mention involvement in particular agricultural crises, such as infestations of Mediterranean fruit fly or outbreaks of

hog cholera. But home extension went beyond these emergency actions to delve into long-term reforms that did not fit existing models.

First, extension workers enhanced familiar programs to fit changing times. Clothing construction and canning continued, but HDAs added to these lessons those on wise consumer choices. Vague discussions on family time evolved into specific evaluations of and advice about childhood development, family power dynamics, challenges facing newlyweds and empty-nesters, even mild sex education for teenagers. Enhancing the relationship between women and technology remained at the forefront of home demonstration's agenda, and it kept pace with changing gadgetry—pressure cookers, electricity, automobiles, and, much later, computers. Health programs expanded to include cancer awareness and driver safety. As more family members worked and consumed outside the home, extension agents devoted increased attention to debt management, wise use of credit (and later, credit counseling for those who missed the wise use talk). Agents also helped families navigate the everyday legal matters they were likely to face, including insurance, wills and loans.

As these topics attest, home extension was still capable of significant reforms. But after 1945, those reforms looked ever more like tips and advice. Comprehensive change was losing ground to specialized seminars. True, home extension agents were keeping up by staying contemporary, attuned to local desires, just as they had been for three decades. But a shift clearly was underway. That extension responded was admirable, but it chose to respond in ways that further undermined its original, zealous determination. Extension agents' choices, and their consequences, after 1960 most clearly demonstrate the final stages of home demonstration's evolution from a mission to a career, and the attendant losses for those who once were its beneficiaries.



Figure 6-2. Hardee County citizens in 1947 preparing and gathering canned foods to donate to needy families in Europe, and a Jacksonville woman's personal contribution to the relief efforts coordinated as part of National Home Demonstration Week. Source: *Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics. Report of General Activities for 1947*, 62; *Farm and Livestock Record* (?) 8 May 1946. Home Demonstration Scrapbook (SC-158-6).

MISS MARY E. KEOWN
STATE HOME DEM. AGENT
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO

EL HERALDO DE EXTENSION



PUBLICADO POR EL SERVICIO DE EXTENSION AGRICOLA DEL COLEGIO DE AGRICULTURA Y ARTES MANUFACTURAS DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO, EN COOPERACION CON EL DEPARTAMENTO DE AGRICULTURA DE ESTADOS UNIDOS.

VOL. 2

Rio Piedras, P. R., Septiembre de 1940

No. 9

CON RESPECTO AL "TRATO DE COLONOS NUEVOS"

Expede Nota la "AAA"

Los edificios de San Juan de la AAA suficientemente sencillos.

La oficina local de la Administración de Alzate Agrícola en San Juan está recibiendo constantemente numerosas cartas de personas que desean solicitar para el llamado "trato de colono nuevo" bajo el programa establecido para Puerto Rico.

Los agricultores deben recordar que bajo las regulaciones existentes no se dará consideración a solicitudes del llamado "trato de colono nuevo" con respecto a tierra en la cual se sembró café después de diciembre 31 de 1935. Por lo tanto al establecer un programa sucroero para Puerto Rico para el 1941 bajo las disposiciones de la Ley Azucarera de 1937 la UDA extenderá de la misma manera

EL PERSONAL DE CAMPO DEL SERVICIO DE EXTENSION SE APRESTA A AYUDAR A LOS ALGODONEROS

Serán reuniones celebradas en Isabela para estudiar los mejores métodos de clasificación.

El Servicio de Extensión Agrícola está seriamente interesado en que el agricultor obtenga siempre el mayor lucro posible de su cosecha. Este interés no halla excepción en el caso de los algodónes más ahora cuando vuelve el algodón a su período de maduración en nuestra isla.

Para que el personal del Servicio de Extensión esté en posición de orientar una eficientemente al agricultor de algodón en todo lo relacionado a este cultivo especialmente la clasificación

dados a presentas por los agentes, quienes demostraron mucha interés sobre el funcionamiento de la cosecha.

Después de estas presentas se dio una vuelta al edificio para ver como trabajan los desmotadores en sus tareas, como se embalan las pajas con las hojas de algodón desmotado, como se suelta la semilla con el fin de lavar, secar y hacer almuerzo para el ganado, etc.

En una reunión... en...

101 PERSONAS CONCURRERON A REUNION EN CEIBA

87 Niños y Niñas Ingresan en los Clubs 4-H

El día 10 de septiembre, y en la finca del señor Mariano Tufiño, del barrio Chaparral, de Ceiba, tuvo lugar una reunión de campo a la que asistieron 101 personas, niños y adultos del barrio.

El objeto de esta reunión era el de desarrollar un corto programa educacional y el de organizar uno o más clubs 4-H en el barrio.

Como parte del programa del día los asistentes visitaron un predio de cuatro cuerdas sembrado en frutales alternados de café, hame de guineo, hame portugués, y plátano. Luego de esta visita el señor F. J. Rodríguez

Figure 6-3. This Extension newspaper from Puerto Rico is dated 1940; Mary Keown continued to receive it in Florida long after she returned to the state in 1935 and began her tenure as State HDA in 1936. Home Demonstration Scrapbook (SC-158-6).

A Career for You!

If You Want ...

- A good salary in comparison with other careers for women
- A job which will challenge your ability
- An opportunity to use your own initiative and originality
- Continuous professional improvement
- Satisfaction in your own growth

Then You Will Like Being A ...

Florida
Home Demonstration
Agent

FOR MORE INFORMATION WRITE OR CALL:

Miss Anna Mae Sikes
State Home Demonstration Agent
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

in
Home Demonstration
Work in Florida ...



Figure 6-4. With her stylish dress, business-like portfolio and car, this woman defines the career-agent who emerged in extension literature after World War II. Home demonstration recruitment brochure (SC-158-8).



If You Become A Home Demonstration Agent.

YOU WILL...

Be a member of the Florida Agricultural Extension Service with faculty status at the University of Florida and Florida State University

Work with homemakers and 4-H Club girls in developing programs to meet their needs and interests

Have the help of supervisors and specialists from the State Home Demonstration Office to help you organize and make your work effective

Have an office at the county seat, where you work with the Agricultural Agents in a unified county Extension program

Have retirement and group medical protection; annual vacation leave, and sick leave when necessary

YOU WILL NEED...

A college degree in Home Economics with undergraduate or graduate pre-service training for Home Demonstration Work

An automobile of your own (travel allotment will be provided)

Enthusiasm and energy to plan, organize and carry out a program of work in the county

Good health

A keen sense of responsibility, integrity, loyalty, tact

A genuine liking for people and a sense of humor

A neat, well-groomed appearance

Ability

- to teach effectively, both adults and youth
- to lead, but not boss
- to speak and write well
- to cooperate with others
- to keep on learning



Figure 6-5. This 1950s recruitment brochure highlights what the Extension Service sought in its female agents, and what they might expect from a career in extension work. Brochures regarding home demonstration (SC-158-8).

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE: THE PRICE OF DURABILITY

From 1915 to 1960, home demonstration underwent significant changes in its objectives, personnel, administration, style, and programs. But throughout that period, HDAs and their immediate successors remained, for the most part, intensely committed to the work they saw as a mission. In the forty years since then, home extension work ostensibly has been guided by the same principle that guided it since its inception—to educate families so that they might help themselves improve their overall standard of living. But that objective now seems generic, because the mission that gave it flesh has been hollowed out. The zeal, the vigor, the determination, the blunt realism that characterized Virginia Moore’s sanitation bulletin is gone. Certainly, context has made a difference in what home extension could and could not do over the years. That was no less true after 1960, of course. But home extension weathered the contextual changes it faced in such a way that it left behind what was no longer efficient, mainstream, or cost effective—rural families, rural health care, rural education—all those people and needs that once had driven home demonstration.

To be relevant, home extension shifted to working with people and on projects that, though worthwhile, could be cared for by any number of organizations that were created for just such a task. Yes, most Floridians, like most Americans, are not rural and it makes better sense perhaps for home extension to devote its attention to this new majority. But home extension work not only neglects its rural roots, the nature of its work has devolved into a loose collection of seminars, bulletins, and websites. Highly specialized, thinly spread, and largely impersonal, modern home extension retains little, if anything, of its predecessors

impressive community-oriented, elemental, missionary-inspired nature. How did this happen? The answer lies largely within the reform-to-career process itself, for in its pursuit of professional legitimacy, home extension backed itself into an unfriendly corner. Part of its subsequent redemption dealt with expanding its curriculum into timely, even controversial, problems, but unlike reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, these new efforts were little more than one more voice in an already loud room.

The first post-1960 home extension makeover began with administrative changes initiated by powerful societal changes. In 1963, as part of the broader civil rights movement, Florida extension was re-organized. State home demonstration staff members were transferred from Florida State University to University of Florida, and Floy Britt was transferred from Florida A & M to Florida State. Her title as Negro District Agent was changed to Extension Home Economist—Special Programs. And HDAs became EHEs: Extension Home Economics agents. Then, in 1968 female district agent positions were deleted and replaced by specific program assignments. The State leader became the Assistant Dean for Home Economics, and county directors were created to oversee all county personnel. In 1971, the Assistant Dean of Extension Home Economics became the Assistant Dean of Human Resource Development, and then became the Assistant Dean of Extension Home Economics once again.¹

Should this consolidation, reassignment, and re-titling seem confusing, it is worth remembering that the implications of all these changes were equally, if not more, problematic. For logistical purposes, the consolidation of personnel at two, rather than three, universities was an improvement. For ethical purposes, the weakened distinctions between extension staff based on race and sex also were an improvement. For professional purposes, the new titles for

¹ *Florida Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Handbook 2002-2003* (<http://feafcs.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf-docs/FEAFCSHandbook.pdf>) (20 August 2005).

extension women, linking them more directly with both the home economics profession and the extension profession, was an improvement. By all appearances, then, extension work was moving toward a more integrated, less compartmentalized future. But at the same time, though personnel rosters no longer separated white and black agents, they did demote all but senior agents. The 1963 report, for example, named each county's personnel, noting that names in blue denoted the county and home demonstration agents. But the only names in blue were those of white agents, even in counties where black agents were still working. The administrative manifestation of logistical and legal consolidation, therefore, boded well for more seamless work and the appearance of equity, but less so for the status of individual workers. In fact, the blue names represented not only white agents, but also only those working as a lead agent, not an assistant, so both black HDAs and white assistant agents appeared to slip into benign anonymity in the reports produced for public consumption.²

When HDAs were not anonymous, they faced hostility, another drawback of the increased professionalism of the home demonstration moniker. True, Extension Home Economists connoted a more precise sense of who HDAs were and what they did. Affiliated with the professional world of Ellen Richards' home economists, but distinguished from them by the informal education of the Extension Service, Extension Home Economists appeared perfectly poised to assume a more reputable position as reformers and command a greater share of respect from both the public and other extension personnel. Unfortunately, HDAs became EHEs at precisely the wrong time. Their apparent interest in improved domesticity caught the attention, and the wrath, of feminists who ignored home economics' and its affiliates' history of reform, as well as the independent image of the professional agent in the brochures. Betty Freidan charged home economists with perpetuating women's servitude, *Ms.*

² *1963 Annual Report of the Florida Agricultural Extension Service* (Gainesville: Florida Agricultural Extension Service, 1964).

Editor Robin Morgan in 1972 called home economists “the enemy” to their faces, and Dierdre English and Barbara Ehrenreich published an entire book in 1978 lambasting “experts’ advice to women.” Though home economists had emerged from the ranks of social scientists and suffragettes, their domestic persona overshadowed their academic intelligence.³

Not only did HDAs become even more affiliated with the supposedly silly as a result of a more overt alliance between themselves and home economics, they were absorbed more fully into the wider home economics arena just as home economics itself was undergoing an identity crisis. Stung by the backlash from critics like Freidan, home economists sought ways to refashion themselves as more relevant, professional, and educated. In the 1980s and 1990s, home economists launched into a full-scale attempt to secure legitimacy, partly by changing their name. Though human ecology eventually became the umbrella term for home economics, family and consumer sciences, and a host of similar programs, traditionalists regarded it as a bad omen that educators and reformers with their pedigree were playing at something as ridiculous as a name game. One dean of human ecology regarded the semantic makeover as an assault on home economists’ original identity.⁴

When the dust finally settled, the fallout was worse than any benefit gleaned. On the surface, home economics, and extension home economics with it, appeared more professional, and the reality of human ecology training is anything but traditional. Cornell’s College of Human Ecology includes everything from “the most-molecular life and physical sciences to social sciences to design and fine arts,” said its dean in 2000. But stereotypes die hard, and the public at large was not convinced. Critics and the casual observer alike continued to regard home economics as little more than Tupperware parties, knitting bees, and high school

³ Alison Schneider, “It’s Not Your Mother’s Home Economics,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (13 October 2000). I thank one of Florida’s current Family and Consumer Sciences agents for bringing this article to my attention.

⁴ Schneider, “It’s Not Your Mother’s Home Economics,” 5.

recipes for chocolate chip cookies. As a result, fewer students sought careers in home economics, for they could not imagine any use for such a degree except in teaching, or maybe extension work. As interest declined, so did the already waning support of universities seeking to reallocate resources. Even at universities like Cornell, where home economics celebrated its centennial, funding is being cut and home economics programs are in real danger of elimination.⁵

Perhaps even worse, within home economics—and among FCS personnel, as well—home economists questioned their own colleagues' purpose and benefit to home economics. For, as students less often sought home economics degrees, other degrees came to dominate in the field, such as sociology, chemistry, and public health. Most within the profession praised this interdisciplinary approach, but others argued that it deteriorated the effectiveness of home economics as a broad educational force, and fractured both its ranks and its vision. Many in the field regarded themselves not as a home economist, but as “a member of a discipline.”⁶ Extension personnel agreed on both counts; interdisciplinary strengths had always been a facet of extension work, because nearly all agents had been equipped and ready to handle nearly all programs. The new emphasis, in contrast, created a Service of specialists, agents capable of dealing with only select topics. Though the shift from reform to career had great potential for revitalizing home demonstration, it more often backfired by fragmenting an already beleaguered force. Still, the attention to a wider variety of disciplines and a wider scope of work did have potential benefits. Though in some cases post-1960 home extension took its new specializations and applied them to old work, as often it simply added its efforts to the already swelling ranks of social reformers.

⁵ Schneider, “It’s Not Your Mother’s Home Economics,” 2.

⁶ Schneider, “It’s Not Your Mother’s Home Economics,” 5.

First, reflecting the concerns of society-at-large, EHEs sought ways to make themselves useful to neglected segments of Florida's population. In 1964, EHEs attended an in-service training for working with low socio-economic Floridians. Leaders pointed out that extension always had been interested in and worked with "families whose incomes are inadequate to meet their living needs," but this new training was designed to teach agents how best to deal with low-income families from a variety of settings, primarily urban. Inter-agency cooperation was once again key, but the roster of participants reflected a world outside rural hamlets, including the Public Housing Administration and State Department of Welfare. The exact nature of the programs developed is less significant than the content and tone of the training itself. The vehemence of rural reformers like Virginia Moore had been supplanted by equally outraged speakers reflecting on the very fact of poverty in a prosperous country. Though speakers seldom differentiated between the urban and rural poor, their remarks clearly reflected a nation arming itself for a War on Poverty.⁷

In the 1970s and 1980s, home extension devoted attention to the aged (not surprising in Florida), women's liberation, single-parent families, and teen pregnancy. What particularly caught their eye was homelessness. Perhaps as a program once devoted to improving home life, the absence of one was particularly striking. More so than had been true in the past, extension workers and home economists were willing to intervene in policy making. The *Journal of Home Economics* argued that they had three ways to help the homeless, including technical skill, research skills, and advocacy. Advocacy extended beyond a caring hand into evaluating and attempting to influence policymaking regarding resources for the homeless. Extension personnel became involved in refining existing resources, as well, such as Food Stamps and shelters. The attention to homelessness did not pass away with time. Delores

⁷ *Working with Low Socio-Economic Families and Groups—In-Service Training for Extension Home Economists, April 13-17, 1964*, 1, 12-15, 18, 24-33.

Truesdell from Florida State University's College of Human Sciences described in 2001 the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Initiative, in which college students working toward nutritionist degrees worked within the shelter system to provide more adequate meals for the homeless.⁸ These programs and efforts were valuable, of course, but they increasingly drew home extension into what was current (urban poverty, for example) and away from those that might have benefited from a combination of current concerns and traditional reforms (the rural poor, for example).

Most clearly indicative of how home extension embraced current context are those issues that were controversial for the public. Though home demonstration had not been inclined to deal with hot-button issues, FCS has. In the last five years, the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* has devoted space to articles on same-sex relationships, ("we in the profession have embraced a definition of family that addresses diverse family structures"), battered women syndrome and family violence ("elements of ritual abuse include multiple victims and perpetrators, very severe physical and sexual abuse, drugging and . . . terrorism"), internet safety for children, and stem cell research. In the wake of September 11, articles addressed globalization, the Columbine shootings prompted numerous articles on school violence, and increasing environmental crises framed articles on sustainability. In every case, the articles addressed not only the issue, but what FCS could do to affect it.⁹ Here again, these

⁸ See, for example, Peggy S. Berger and Kenneth R. Tremblay, Jr., "Homelessness: Strategies for Education, Advocacy and Research," *Journal of Home Economics* 81 (Fall 1989): 27-32; Delores Truesdell, "Nutrition Education and Food for the Homeless—University Outreach," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 93 (2001): 37-41.

⁹ For example, see Shirley L. Baugher, "Same Sex Relationships," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 92 (2000): 38-39; B. Marie Brady, "America in Crisis: Mind Control/Ritual Trauma/Battered Woman Syndrome and Family Violence," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 95 (2000): 17-19; "Internet Safety and Children," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 93 (2001): 22; David A. Prentice, "Science and Ethics: The Intertwined Debate on Stem Cells," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 95 (2003): 6-7; Mary Andrews, "Globalization: The Role of FCS in Shaping the New World Community," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 95 (2003): 4-8; Martha Karen Lovell and Bernice Richardson, "Family and Consumer Sciences Educators Can Play Significant Roles

are weighty issues, but extension's treatment of them lacks the weighty response once indicative of home demonstration reforms. Moreover, these articles represent the newer battery approach to reform—many issues with many cursory treatments.

So, given the messy and not always fruitful professional shuffling and the considerable diversification of the reform agenda following World War II, what has been the significance of home extension in the post-war world? Clearly, elaborating upon what home extension already was accomplishing has been a boon for agents' durability and the good they have been able to do among new clients they might otherwise never have met. The difficulty lies in determining which principles and opportunities should have been paramount. The inherent subjectivity of such a determination, however, makes a clear answer elusive. Likewise, the professional shift from reform to career appears to take home demonstration away from its commitment to improvement, but without some measure of professional adaptation, personnel might have shrunk to such an extent that *all* work ceased.

That said, the constant adaptation after 1945 sheared away too much of what home extension was best at. The endurance of home extension is compelling, but it had two consequences. First, home demonstration, then extension home economics, pursued professional legitimacy at the expense of professional integrity. However many ways we might define "reform," the increased semantic and professional ties to home economics put too much distance between the reformers and the clients. For decades, critics had accused HDAs of being out of touch, too consumed with their university educations to understand "real" people's needs. And for decades, critics were wrong. HDAs took their educations into the trenches and made them work for the people around them. Their top priority was advocating for, educating, and empowering rural women and families who had few other

in Curbing Violence," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 93 (2001): 24-27; Susan Winchip, "Green Design for a Healthy and Safe Environment," *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 95 (2003): 26-32.

resources at their disposal to practically improve their lot. But the increased link to university-oriented professionalism effectively subverted the home demonstration reform to the home economics career. Indeed, there is little distinction between them. The *Journal of Home Economics* became the *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*; the word extension does not even appear in the Family and Consumer Sciences title. Sadly, the effort to establish professional legitimacy did not even pay off. FCS personnel have the same problem their predecessors did—either the public is totally ignorant of who agents are and what they do, or they dismiss what they do as entirely superficial.

Second, home extension's efforts to incorporate new issues into its programs was laudable, but the end result was a much wider, but far less in-depth, agenda. That trend began early. A 1955 brochure on how home demonstration had changed since its inception compared the division of agents' time. In 1925, HDAs worked on six major programs; by 1955, the number of programs had doubled, cutting the time for each in half.¹⁰ The brochure's purpose was to describe home demonstration as a progressive, ambitious program, much more than little old ladies canning squash. The reality was that as the work became more diverse, agents had less time to devote to making each phase successful, and the whole program began to resemble an assortment of seminars rather than a unified, comprehensive mission. Cooperative extension work is replete with specialists who host a particular aspect of extension, but few agents are skilled in comprehensive reforms. Naturally, this is not simply the fault of the extension workers. Not only did the urban-rural balance change, but the dynamic of clients' daily lives did, as well. Many women no longer had time for or interest in organized club meetings or regular demonstrations. And many of the new clients, like business owners, had no use for advice beyond the particular.

¹⁰ *Changing Styles in Home Demonstration Work* (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1955).

FCS agents still subscribe to the extension philosophy of guided self-help, but like the discipline-oriented home economics majors, agents' work is narrowly defined. That is not to say that the education and assistance agents offer those they meet with is not invaluable, but it is true, as some agents will attest, that FCS covers territory also covered by a multitude of organizations, especially in the wake of social reform movements from the 1960s and 1970s onward. There was a time that home demonstration truly filled a void in reform and aid. That no longer is the case. FCS is still relevant, but so are many others, so that perhaps FCS would be better suited to concentrating its efforts in areas that remain neglected—like rural communities. There are many such communities in Florida, not the least of which are composed of farm laborers. Farmworkers have the benefit of advocacy groups to speak for them, but some of the conditions that draw advocates' attention are precisely those that home extension could help workers improve upon. Would or could extension agents bring an end to the exploitative systems that govern farmworkers' lives? Likely not—that is what the advocacy groups are for. But home extension agents could apply their original zest for practical reform to the everyday dangers and discomforts farmworkers endure and help them improve at least that lot. As for other potential reforms, since there are so many competitors, FCS and its potential clients might be better served by agents zeroing in on a select few programs that they can build, maintain, and carry out *better than* anyone else.

That, of course, is my opinion in light of the past ninety years of home extension history in Florida. Those who work in extension now are better able to predict its future than I am. To gauge current FCS personnel's sense of what lies ahead for them, I sent them a brief questionnaire. Of the sixty-four sent, I received responses from about 40 percent of the recipients. Their answers are revealing for both how extension has changed (and how it has not) and how its own workers see their future. Within the FCS ranks, the vast majority of

personnel are female, and most still are white. Hispanic women are joining, but there are not many more African-American women today in home extension than there were before the Service was integrated. What is encouraging is that about 30 percent of County Extension Directors are women, and women have served as directors of the entire Extension Service in the state. In contrast, the client base has changed dramatically. Depending on the county, there are programs that have no rural base whatsoever, and others that have a sizeable mix of rural and urban. Moreover, many FCS personnel work with either an equal number of men and women, or almost entirely men. For example, one participant deals almost exclusively with men, usually inmates awaiting release and homeless veterans.

Every woman who responded emphasized the goals of FCS as empowerment for people, to gain knowledge and use it to better their everyday lives. That essential objective has not changed from home demonstration's inception nearly a century ago. But the impact of applying the old mission to new people is not always for the best, according to some agents. One participant laments that one of the casualties of moving forward is that "we don't have that relationship between the farming families with FCS anymore." Samantha Kennedy in Manatee County agrees that FCS is becoming ever more urban because the clientele is, but she predicts that there will be "very few problems with being able to evolve to clientele needs."

Nearly every respondent would have agreed with their predecessors about the obstacles facing extension work: never enough time, money or visibility. Nearly a century after home extension work began in Florida, current FCS personnel are waging the same public relations battles that HDAs did decades ago. A recurrent complaint in FCS is a "lack of knowledge about Extension (and the how and whys of our existence)" among the public and "a lack of commissioners and community leaders seeing us as a resource." Though it did not

appear often, there is, too, a concern that FCS is overshadowed by agricultural extension—
 “when one mentions Extension people [are] thinking Ag.”

As for the future of FCS in Florida, respondent opinions are divided between solid optimism, some concern, and outright gloom. One agent, at work in extension for more than twenty years, predicted that FCS would be “increasing” over the next few decades, that its programs “are reaching a diverse audience.” Moreover, its programs “are in demand,” particularly nutrition and parenting. A colleague agrees that demands for FCS subject matter will increase, but that organized clubs will decrease as a method of involvement as “working women with young families” struggle to balance the demands on their time. These women are interested in FCS education, but “they do not want strings attached.” Diana Converse, of Hillsborough County FCS, cites an additional challenge in retaining “traditional audiences”—
 “People are getting information via the computer now, even though much of it is questionable as to accuracy.” After decades of building on a reputation as a reliable and informed source of information, “Extension has to compete with so many others.” But, like their predecessors, these FCS agents are willing to adapt in order to compete.

There is more than a little concern, however, among FCS agents about what lies ahead. Allen fears that declining enrollment and tightening budgets will “see us resorting to fee-for-service programs.” Additionally, she is concerned that FCS will move away from its family-based clientele to a “focus on business/industry/associations etc. due to their political clout/power. The little old lady who is told what food to throw out after the hurricane is not going to have the resources to fight our fight.” The outlook as her colleagues see it is even direr. Asked about the future of FCS, one participant sees it “declining and perhaps being replaced with the different areas of the program.” The joint impact of specialization, lack of publicity, and declining participation has one result according to a participant: FCS will move

into “a downward spiral.” For her, the major problems are more internal than external. For instance, “information from the university is too elementary—[it] would be an insult to participants.” Moreover, “people writing program materials [are] not in touch with those of us in the trenches. Extension has become a caste system which does not serve the public well.”

Perhaps the keenest evaluation comes from one long-time agent’s perceptions:

FCS as a profession is struggling to survive. . . It’s still seen as a women’s profession and has second-class status. Although FCS Extension is surviving in Florida—better than some other states—we suffer from being an “add on” to agriculture. Or perhaps we have survived because of it?

As has been true for the past ninety years, home extension is not an impenetrable reform fortress—modern agents are under as much pressure to keep ahead of change as their predecessors were, and they face the same consequences if they fail—obsolescence, insignificance, and elimination. But what will the consequences be of even greater fragmentation? Is a “fee for service” seminar to businessmen where FCS wants to be?

The future is uncertain, but the past for female extension has been long and in many ways successful, and it is with the long-term significance of home demonstration that I want to end the dissertation. How it managed to endure for so long has as much to do with what it did as with how it did it. HDAs’ skills in negotiation, adaptation, and education served them well, but home demonstration was more than an over-eager agent talking to walls. Women and families *responded*, and their participation could make or break home demonstration at any point in this story. Ultimately, all the contributions and contradictions of home demonstration boil down to two simple essentials. First, home demonstration has been one of the few large, mainstream programs to directly address rural women’s needs and aspirations. Second, by bringing basic education and support to numerous families, first rural and then urban, too, HDAs empowered them to take control of their resources, their health, and their sense of well-being. Granted, home demonstration’s reforms did not change the fact of tenancy or Jim

Crow or gender subordination, but *within* those constraints, home demonstration made a difference. My critique of modern FCS is based in part on what home demonstration accomplished decades ago. American female extension will likely never again capture the energy, the urgency, and the promise of the decades HDAs spent working with women to preserve food or build privies. The need was so great, the solutions so limited, that HDAs' work had a profoundly fundamental quality that gave it a lasting importance.

Privies mattered not because they saved populations, but because they saved people. No amount of racial or gender analysis is going to change the fact that hookworms thrive in contaminated soil. J. D. Tillman's children testify to that. No elaborate arguments about the intrusion of the state are going to change the fact that preserved vegetables are insurance against illness and insecurity. Bettie Caudle made that clear. Home demonstration was never about spectacular reforms or sweeping social change, so historians—and HDAs—looking for both have been disappointed. It is unfortunate perhaps that in the effort to stay relevant, home demonstration sought the spectacular and the sweeping after all. But power was elemental, not extraordinary. That truth encapsulates what home demonstration “did” all those years, for despite all their talk about rural renewal and the “fine art of living,” HDAs actually accomplished much more. In the end, what HDAs achieved was to make the unimproved toilet a little less prevalent.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

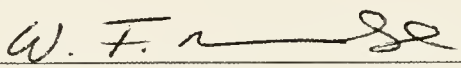
After Kelly Minor graduated from Niceville High School in 1992, she began her college career with an Associate's degree at Okaloosa-Walton Community College, and then completed a bachelor's degree in History Education at University of West Florida in Pensacola. UWF proved a most rewarding college choice, for there she met and learned from talented, interested faculty who helped guide her toward her current research in rural reform. She decided to earn her master's degree toward teaching at the college level, and chose to stay at UWF for it. The M.A. in History complete in 1999, she pursued her Ph.D., this time at University of Florida, in Gainesville. It is there that her research matured under the guidance of Fitz Brundage and the invaluable collaboration of her peers. The author earned her doctorate in History, with a specialization in American agrarian reform, in 2005.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



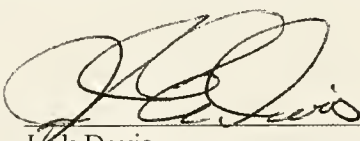
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Associate Professor of History

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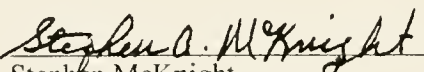
W. Fitzhugh Brundage
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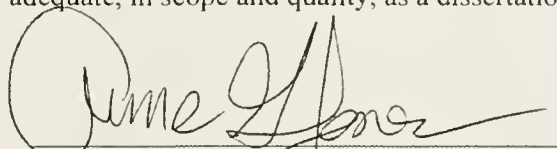


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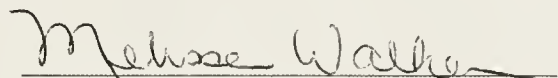
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Louise Newman
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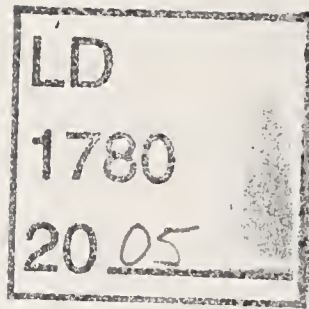
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 2005

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